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# TMG 4 (2018): Seals--Making and Marking Connections Across the Medieval World

Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak

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THE MEDIEVAL GLOBE  
EXECUTIVE EDITOR CAROL SYMES

# SEALS

## MAKING AND MARKING CONNECTIONS ACROSS THE MEDIEVAL WORLD

Edited by

**BRIGITTE M. BEDOS-REZAK**

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**SEALS—MAKING AND  
MARKING CONNECTIONS  
ACROSS THE  
MEDIEVAL WORLD**

# THE MEDIEVAL GLOBE

The Medieval Globe provides an interdisciplinary forum for scholars of all world areas by focusing on convergence, movement, and interdependence. Contributions to a global understanding of the medieval period (broadly defined) need not encompass the globe in any territorial sense. Rather, TMG advances a new theory and praxis of medieval studies by bringing into view phenomena that have been rendered practically or conceptually invisible by anachronistic boundaries, categories, and expectations. TMG also broadens discussion of the ways that medieval processes inform the global present and shape visions of the future.

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## Volume 4

**SEALS—MAKING AND  
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Edited by  
**BRIGITTE MIRIAM BEDOS-REZAK**

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# CONTENTS

List of Illustrations.....	vi
Acknowledgements .....	x
Cultural Transactions: An Introduction to Medieval Seals from a Global Perspective <b>BRIGITTE MIRIAM BEDOS-REZAK</b> .....	1
Seals as Conceptual and Ritual Tools in Chinese Buddhism, ca. 600–1000 CE <b>PAUL COPP</b> .....	15
Imprinting Powers: The Astrological Seal and Its Doctrinal Meanings in the Latin West <b>NICOLAS WEILL-PAROT</b> .....	49
A Medieval Solution to an Early Modern Problem? The Royal Animal Seals of Jambi <b>ANNABEL TEH GALLOP</b> .....	73
Expressing New Rule: Seals from Early Islamic Egypt and Syria, 600–800 CE <b>PETRA M. SIJPESTEIJN</b> .....	99
The Formulation of Urban Identity on Byzantine Seals <b>CLAUDIA SODE</b> .....	149
The Cloth Seal: A Mark of Quality, Identification, or Taxation? <b>JOHN CHERRY</b> .....	167
Archaeology and Sigillography in Northern Europe <b>MICHAEL ANDERSEN</b> .....	193
Medieval Treaties and the Diplomatic Aesthetic <b>JESSICA BERENBEIM</b> .....	213
Index.....	239

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

### Figures

Figure 2.1a–b. Huangshen yuezhang seal, front and back .....	31
Figure 2.2. <i>Padma</i> (Lotus) seal, from a manual for the making and use of Buddhist talisman-seals (ninth to tenth centuries) .....	36
Figure 4.1. Seal of Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin of Jambi (r. 1742–ca. 1770) .....	81
Figure 4.2. Seal of Sultan Masud Badaruddin of Jambi (r. ca. 1770–ca. 1790) .....	82
Figure 4.3. Seal of Sultan Taha Saifuddin (r. 1855–1904) .....	83
Figure 4.4. Seal of Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin (r. 1886–1899) .....	85
Figure 4.5. Brick engraved with an eight-petalled lotus design, ca. ninth to fourteenth centuries .....	86
Figure 4.6. Minangkabau seal of patronage issued to the sultan of Jambi, impressed on a letter from 1799 .....	89
Figure 4.7. Seal of Pangiran Suta Wijaya, later Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin of Jambi (r. 1742–ca. 1770) .....	93
Figure 5.1a–b. Arabic tax quittance and seal from Khurasan, dated Šafar 150 (March–April 767) .....	102
Figure 5.2a–b. Poll tax receipt and seal, dated Ramaḍān 196 (May–June 812) .....	103
Figure 5.3a–b. Sealed deed recording the gift of an estate and of a female slave, dated in the month Second New-year 478 (June–July 700). The seal that was attached to the closed document depicts the image of a male buste. ....	104–5
Figure 5.4a–c. Sealed Arabic order of payment, dated 9 Ramaḍān 196 (May 24, 812), front and back, and detail of the seal, with the name of the finance director al-Ḥasan b. Saʿīd .....	105–6
Figure 5.5a–b. Umayyad two-sided lead seal imprint recording the poll tax payment made by the Jewish inhabitants of Tiberias .....	106
Figure 5.6a–b. Coptic official document from the seventh to eighth centuries and seal imprint depicting a sitting hare .....	107
Figure 5.7a–c. Delivery order from and sealed by the governor ʿAmr b. al-ʿAṣ (d. 664) to the administrator of Heracleopolis/Ihnās, front and back. ....	108–9

Figure 5.8a–c. Arabic sealed tax receipt dated 291 (904), front and back, and seal imprint with the name of the tax official Yalhawayh. ....	109
Figure 5.9a–b. Sealed letter and sealing from the governor Qurra b. Sharīk to Basileios, administrator of Ishqūh/Aphroditō, dated Şafar 91 (December 709–January 710). ....	110–11
Figure 5.10a–b. Two-sided lead seal imprint recording the tribute or poll tax paid by the inhabitants of Seville, early eighth century. ....	112
Figure 5.11a–b. Two-sided lead imprint recording the tribute paid by the inhabitants of the town of Jaen and its hinterland, early eighth century. ....	116
Figure 5.12. One-sided lead seal imprint recording an order of ‘Anbasa b. Suhaym, governor of al-Andalus (in office 721–725) ....	116
Figure 5.13a–b. Two-sided lead seal imprint recording the order by al-Ḥurr, governor of Andalusia (in office 715–718) ....	117
Figure 5.14a–b. Sealed Arabic legal document from Khurasan recording the emancipation of a slave, dated Sha‘ban 146 (October– November 763) and the clay sealing showing multiple imprints ....	118
Figure 5.15a–b. Tax quittance from Khurasan, dated Rabī‘ II 147 (June–July 764), with clay seal imprint. ....	119
Figure 5.16a–b. Two-sided lead seal imprint from the district of ‘Amwās in Palestine, eighth century ....	120
Figure 5.17. Textile covering or container with the name of the addressee, ninth century or later ....	121
Figure 6.1. Seal of Constantine, <i>proedros</i> (Metropolitan) of Thessaloniki, twelfth century ....	151
Figure 6.2. Seal of the <i>koinon</i> of Sinope, seventh century ....	154
Figure 6.3. Seal of the <i>koinon</i> of the Dekapolis of Isauria, seventh century ....	154
Figure 6.4. Seal of Apameia and Antioch, sixth to seventh centuries ....	155
Figure 6.5. Seal of John, <i>protospatharios</i> and <i>strategos</i> of Cherson, tenth century. ....	155
Figure 6.6. Seal of John Komnenos Dukas (1240–1242) ....	156
Figure 6.7. Seal of Michael, bishop of Charioupolis, eleventh century ....	157
Figure 7.1. Lead cloth seal folded over and still attached to a piece of coarse woollen cloth. ....	169

Figure 7.2. Drawing of blank two- and four-part seals. ....	169
Figure 7.3. Obverse of lead seal for the Dutch immigrant community in Colchester .....	176
Figure 7.4. Lead cloth seal for the United East India Company. ....	176
Figure 7.5. Lead cloth seal for Wesel, Germany. ....	176
Figure 7.6. Stone sculpture from Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden, showing guild officials inspecting cloth .....	187
Figure 8.1. Pilgrim badge in the shape of a seal, from Rocamadour, France; found at Tårnborg, Denmark. ....	196
Figure 8.2. Lead seal impression found in the tomb of Bishop Ulger of Angers (d. 1148) .....	198
Figure 8.3. Seal of bell founder on a fourteenth-century bell from Lumby Church, Denmark. ....	199
Figure 8.4. Seal matrix of Bishop Henrik of Stavanger, Norway (r. 1207–1224), found at the site of the demolished Mejlby Church near Randers, Denmark. ....	202
Figure 8.5. Seal matrix of Bishop Magnus of Växjö Sweden (r. ca. 1292–1319), found in the churchyard of Fakse Church, Denmark .....	203
Figure 8.6. Seal matrix of Bishop Jon of Skalholt, Iceland (r. ca. 1406–1413), found at the site of the demolished Carmelite monastery in Aarhus, Denmark .....	204
Figure 8.7. Seal matrix of an unidentified Bishop Henrik, found at Hemsedal Church, Norway. ....	204
Figure 9.1. Ratification of the Treaty of Windsor (1387), now in England. ....	219
Figure 9.2. Detail of Figure 9.1: initial letter .....	220
Figure 9.3. Detail of Figure 9.1: seal .....	220
Figure 9.4. Detail of Figure 9.1: notarial mark. ....	221
Figure 9.5. Ratification of the Treaty of Windsor (1387–8), now in Portugal .....	222
Figure 9.6. Detail of Figure 9.5: initial .....	223
Figure 9.7. Detail of Figure 9.5: notarial mark. ....	223
Figure 9.8. Articles of Agreement for the Treaty of Windsor. ....	225
Figure 9.9. Ratification of the Treaty of Troyes, now in England .....	226
Figure 9.10. Detail of Figure 9.9: seal .....	227

Figure 9.11. Ratification of the Treaty of Troyes, now in France .....	228
Figure 9.12. Detail of Figure 9.11: initial .....	229

## Map

Map 4.1. The Sultanate of Jambi and its neighbours .....	74
--	----

## Plates

Plate 2.1. Eleven-headed and six-armed Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara) standing on a lotus. China, Tang dynasty (618–907), ca. ninth century .....	28
Plate 2.2. Detail of Plate 2.1: the hand bearing a stamp seal .....	28
Plate 5.1a–b. Copper seal recording a tribute or poll tax payments made by the inhabitants of Egypt in the year 95 (713/14): front and back .....	133
Plate 7.1. One half of a stone mould, used for casting four lead blanks at a time. ....	171
Plate 7.2. Face of the fifteenth-century copper alloy matrix, and a modern cast from it, for the subsidy for Kent .....	178
Plate 7.3. Modern impression from the late fifteenth-century copper alloy matrix for the subsidy for Wiltshire .....	179
Plate 8.1. Seal matrix of Roskilde Cathedral: walrus ivory, twelfth century .....	194
Plate 8.2. Die sheet for stamping metal ornaments (Lund, Sweden) .....	197
Plate 8.3. Three seal-shaped lead tablets, Ribe Cathedral, Denmark, second half of the twelfth century .....	197
Plate 8.4. Lead seal matrix of Baldwin IV, count of Flanders (r. 988–1035), found at Læborg, Denmark. ....	201

## Table

Table 4.1. Rulers of Jambi, seventeenth to nineteenth centuries .....	79
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This volume owes its existence to many. Carol Symes assumed the risk of opening her journal, *The Medieval Globe*, to seals, a subject matter that until recently still belonged to the domain of specialized connoisseurship and technical *Historische Hilfswissenschaften*. By enabling the work of scholars from different times and places to appear in a single volume informed by the conceptual framework of global history, she has provided both a forum and a challenge, which each contributor has taken up with exceptional scholarship and flair. Mike Richardson and Linda Paulus shepherded the volume to publication. To all I extend my thankful appreciation.

Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak

# CULTURAL TRANSACTIONS: AN INTRODUCTION TO MEDIEVAL SEALS FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

BRIGITTE MIRIAM BEDOS-REZAK

When considering metals, in book XXXIII of his *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder (d. 79 CE) broached the topic of sealing:

For my own part, I do not find that any rings were used in the days of the Trojan War; at all events, Homer nowhere makes mention of them; for although he speaks of the practice of sending tablets by way of letter, of clothes and gold and silver plate being kept laid up in chests, still he gives us to understand that they were kept secure by the aid of a knot tied fast, and not under a seal impressed by a ring. ... And even at the present day, the greater part of the nations known to us, peoples who are living under the Roman sway, are not in the habit of wearing rings. Neither in the countries of the East, nor in Egypt, is any use made of seals, the people being content with simple writing only.<sup>1</sup>

Pliny's remarks are not entirely accurate but his perception that the use of seals was sporadic and culturally contingent, rather than sequential and universal, contrasts sharply with the modern understanding of the practice.

The use of seals, both for authenticating and closing, descends, in unbroken succession, from the cylindrical seals of Assyria and Babylon and the cone shaped ones of Persia and the Sassanians, through the scarabs of the Egyptians and Etruscans, to Greece .... Either from Greece or Asia Minor, the seal passed to the Romans ... The Frankish kings ... affixed a signet to their acts, thus forming the connecting link between the use of the signet by the Romans and its revival as a seal in mediaeval times.<sup>2</sup>

Thus wrote Charles Hunter Blair (d. 1962) in an excellent article informed by his deep knowledge of medieval seals acquired while cataloging the seals attached to the

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<sup>1</sup> Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, XXXIII, 4, 6. *Naturalis Historia*, XXXIII, 3, 7. The Latin terms used to designate the seal ring and the action of sealing are *anulus* and *signare*: "Equidem nec iliacis temporibus ullos fuisse anulos video. Nusquam certe homerus dicit, cum et codicillos missitatos epistularum gratia indicet et conditas arcis vestes ac vasa aurea argenteaque et eas colligatas nodi, non anuli, nota .... nullosque omnino maior pars gentium hominumque, etiam qui sub imperio nostro degunt, hodieque habeat. non signat oriens aut aegyptus etiam nunc litteris contenta solis."

<sup>2</sup> Hunter Blair, "Durham," 246-47.

charters of the Benedictine monastery at Durham. Not specific to Blair, such vision of a linear and agentless flow of spatiotemporal continuity has engendered its own permanence. Permeating the European study of seals from its beginnings as a discipline in the *De Re Diplomatica* (1681) of Dom Jean Mabillon, this idea has, indeed to this day, dominated the perception of medieval sealing in manuals of sigillography,<sup>3</sup> symposia and proceedings,<sup>4</sup> essays,<sup>5</sup> and exhibition catalogs.<sup>6</sup> Along the way, the topos of continuity has acquired the connotation of universality,<sup>7</sup> although many cultures, some of them literate, functioned without seals,<sup>8</sup> and even within societies that utilized seals, their role ranged widely, from marginal to highly significant.<sup>9</sup>

To a considerable extent, modern sigillographic scholarship still clings to the nineteenth-century anthropological goal of investigating cultural phenomena to find universal laws of human behavior,<sup>10</sup> -in the case of seals, the need for a universal device “to make honesty unnecessary.”<sup>11</sup>

It is true that by their extensive geographic coverage of China, South East Asia, Arabia, Sasanian Persia, the Muslim Empire, the Byzantine empire, and Western Europe, the essays gathered in this volume offer some support to the notion of a

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3 For instance Kittel, *Siegel*.

4 Collon, “Introduction” to *7000 Years of Seals*, 9-10.

5 Bautier, “Cheminement.”

6 Most recently, in the catalog of an exhibition showcasing the sealed documents preserved in Normandy, in the departmental archives of the Seine-Maritime, *Empreintes du passé. 6000 de sceaux*, 13 : “Si l’étymologie du mot ‘sceau’ vient du latin *sigillum* ..., l’usage du sceau remonte toutefois aux Sumériens vers -4000 av. J.-C. Cette pratique du scellement, largement répandue dans de nombreuses zones géographiques [Europe, Asie, Afrique du Nord, etc.] depuis l’Antiquité, est toujours en usage actuellement.”

7 In *Sceaux et usages de sceaux*, 25, an entire section is titled : “Le sceau, une pratique universelle.”

8 Jewish society in Talmudic times, or the later Roman Empire (see note 9 below), for instance.

9 As in Merovingian and Carolingian times, and Anglo-Saxon England. The essays in *7000 Years of Seals* document uninterrupted seal presence from the Ancient Near East to the nineteenth century, but some authors note interruptions, Henig, “Roman Sealstones,” 93.

10 On the movement of anthropology away from this conception, Schnegg, “Anthropology and Comparison.” The interpretation of similarities that appear in different contexts, and the needs to challenge master narratives and to explain the structures of diversity are discussed in Belich et al., *The Prospect of Global History*, 10-12.

11 Collon, “Introduction,” 9. A desire echoed by Pliny’s lament, *Historia Naturalis*, XXXIII, 7: quae fuit illa vita priscorum, qualis innocentia, in qua nihil signabatur! nunc cibi quoque ac potus anulo vindicantur a rapina. *The Natural History*, XXXIII, 6: “How happy the times, how truly innocent, in which no seal was ever put to anything! At the present day, on the contrary, our very food even and our drink have to be preserved from theft through the agency of the ring.”

widespread, though differential, presence of seals and sealing practices between 400 and 1500 CE. They even implicitly recognize the standardization of typology that has permitted the establishment of seals as a general category. However, the essays collected here refrain from assuming that shared material culture implies shared values; indeed, they even suggest that classificatory mutability in the medieval world may well challenge our modern typology.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, these essays convey no sense that the practices described and analyzed therein represent the ongoing duplication of a single historical model of behavior. Of course, their authors are well aware that sealing constitutes a superficially convergent transnational practice,<sup>13</sup> but they seek to identify the relationships between the modalities of seal operations, and the contexts and directionality of the processes mediated by seals –representation, authorization, identification, transmission, translation, negotiation. In so doing, they expose rather than assume the inter-subjective, transnational, and transcultural connectivity at work in these processes. What emerges from their approach is an understanding that seals functioned in liminal, transitional situations that arose through encounters between different entities involved in legal, administrative, martial, mercantile, or diplomatic exchange. In the course of such often unstable and potentially disruptive encounters, seals upheld personal credentials (Anderson, Sode) and signaled the quality of transnationally circulated goods (Cherry); they enabled dialogue between myth and politics (Gallop) and between competing religions and philosophies (Copp, Weill-Parot); and they facilitated interchange in cases of enmeshed identities (Sijpesteijn) or entangled religious and political settings (Copp, Sijpesteijn, Gallop, Berenbeim).

In the global perspective embraced by this volume, cross-cultural sealing networks connect particular sealing practices, which undergo change as a result but do not necessarily fuse. Such practices remained in tension, involving resistance (Weill-Parot), but also compromises (Berenbeim) and accommodation (Sijpesteijn, Copp). The extension of or adaption to particular forms of seals and seal usage, the co-option and conversion of motifs manifest the force of seals as objects and images that generate sociocultural identification through mutual exchange and visual hybridity.<sup>14</sup>

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**12** Van Oyen, *How Things Make History*, 4-8, 11-31, 112-113, for a criticism of typology and suggestions of alternative methodological approaches. I am indebted to Feldman, *Diplomacy by Design*, for the notion of classificatory mutability.

**13** In the words of Belich et al., *The Prospect of Global History*, 12, discussing the political role of the Church in 1000 or of Islam today in different countries.

**14** Feldman, *Diplomacy*, 8; Flood, *Objects of Translation*, 3-4, 15.

### ***A Class of Objects in Global Perspective***

The acknowledgment of non-western cultures as sources of medieval European sealing suggested that this practice was the product of ongoing global interactions over millennia. Yet, once these origins were granted, the notion of global interaction faded from seal study, while western seals, their functions, materials and forms become the implicit norm, the standard used for comparison with seals and sealing in the rest of the world.

The seals that circulated in the medieval world present a varied landscape of shape, form, and materials. This volume considers that the category "seal" comprises objects whose composition diversely encompasses multiple elements, to the point where it becomes possible to refigure the normal as atypical,<sup>15</sup> or better even, to dispense altogether with such polarization so as to concentrate on the array of possibilities offered by the global.

All seals discussed in the essays imply the use of a device engraved intaglio to imprint a malleable support. The stamping device is called seal, seal-matrix or die; the resulting imprint is termed seal or seal impression, with the term "seal" thus applicable to both elements of the sealing process.

Medieval seal-dies were made of durable materials (stone, brass, silver, iron, tin, ivory, wood) used either as block stamps, or as tongs (boulleterion) or, in the case of precious stones, set within rings. In Malay, no seal-matrix survives before the eighteenth century, when they are metallic.<sup>16</sup>

In his paper on Scandinavian seals of the central Middle Ages, Anderson focuses on Danish metallic seal-matrices, which have recently been unearthed in great numbers by metal detectorists and archaeologists. The resultant corpus, Anderson points out, has changed the nature of seal studies, which heretofore was focused on documentary seals primarily housed in archives, and now has moved into the field of archaeology. John Cherry, in his contribution on cloth seals, Petra Sijpesteijn, in her essay on early seals from Islamic Egypt and Syria (600–800 CE), and Claudia Sode's study of Byzantine seals also stress the implications of archaeological seal findings. In addition to bringing to light much new material, these situated discoveries help delineate zones of seal circulation, a mobility made possible by the seal as a portable object. However, both Anderson and Sijpesteijn warn against equating the finding of seal-like artefacts in a given locale as proof of sealing

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<sup>15</sup> Belich et al., "Introduction," in *The Prospect of Global History*, 14, where the authors also emphasize, in their discussion of comparative history, that "Looked at with a comparative eye, every society of the past, across the globe, gives us a new set of questions to pose of other societies, and a new set of alternatives. The global becomes, indeed, an array of possibilities."

<sup>16</sup> Gallop, *Lasting Impressions*, 74, 88-89.



practiced in that particular locale. Sijpesteijn's cautionary is based on the fact that in the regions under her consideration rings offering the appearance of signets may well have served as jewels rather than seals. Anderson's caveat derives from archaeological theory, which informs his argument that the specific patterns of seal fragmentation, burial, and deposition he has identified are evidence for legal ceremonies of seal destruction that brought people to specific courts, and for international diplomatic encounters on Danish lands. Anderson further emphasizes the distinction between loss and waste on one hand, and deliberate acts of breakage and deposition on the other, with the latter articulating connections between people, places, and objects (seals among them), and thus being integral to the generation of distinct social relations.<sup>17</sup>

Sijpesteijn suggests a distinction between stamp-like ornaments and seal-matrices, defining the latter as devices that produced imprints for the authentication of shipments and documents in the early Muslim Middle East. Paul Copp, in his essay on seals in Chinese Buddhism (ca. 600–1000 CE), also notes that seals were a distinct group within the broader category of stamps. Chinese stamps were used to imprint texts and images, from which they derived their significance. Chinese seals, by contrast, bore the identity of individuals and institutions whose personhood they extended and from which they derived a power of being that imbued both the state officials responsible for them and the documents sealed with them. Such ontological and referential distinctions were, as is further discussed below, central to the metaphorical use of seals in Chinese Buddhism. Both Sijpesteijn and Copp demonstrate an overlap between seals and stamps, with their definitional borders changing as these devices passed through different contexts of utilization and networks of signification. This mutability of category is explored in depth by Nicolas Weill-Parot in his essay on the Christian reception of astrological talismans. Of Greek and Arabic provenance, such talismans were brought to the attention of Christian Europe by the *Speculum astronomiae* (ca. mid-thirteenth century), whose author classified astrological talismans as astral seals. This projection of magical elements onto a pre-existing practice, sealing, that had governmental and legal resonance threatened destabilization and prompted scholarly reflections on royal and astral seals and their modes of agency.

Contributors to the present volume have focused much of their attention on seal impressions. Hand-formed clay registered fingerprints before receiving the impressions of Arab-Muslim seals. The wax impressions that predominated in

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<sup>17</sup> The term 'fragmentation' has been coined to designate this archaeological approach. From among a growing bibliography: Chapman, *Fragmentation*; Brittain and Harris, "Enchaining Arguments."

Northwestern Europe (France, Northern Spain, England, Germany, Scandinavia) were also stamped while held in the hand, thus recording fingerprints as well. Ink seal impressions, on paper and silk documents, and on paintings, circulated widely in China. Lead impressions, or bulls, produced by metallic tongs, were preponderant in Byzantium and throughout the early Muslim empire.

The lead, clay, and (extremely rare) wax imprints found in lands newly brought under Muslim control, such as the provinces of Syria and Egypt and the Sasanian empire discussed by Sijpesteijn, offer a diversity of materials that attests to the circulation of Arab, Byzantine, and Sasanian cultures in these lands. However, the persistent usage of a particular material may have signified pride in asserting a conqueror's custom, or else the retention of a local tradition resisting encroachment by a foreign administration that sought to impose standardization in the form of specific texts, languages, and images. The material composition of seals thus may well have articulated regional identities independently of seals' linguistic and iconographic inscriptions. Avoidance of specific seal materials may even have expressed distancing from a particular practice. For instance, early Muslim bulls, like Byzantine bulls, served as commercial closure and fiscal verification. Additionally, Muslim bulls served as taxation marks (also known as neck-sealing) worn by non-Muslim subjects around their necks to show that they had paid their poll-tax.<sup>18</sup> Lead documentary sealing, however, so prominently practiced in Byzantium, was not the mode in the early Islamic period. Clay was initially affixed to Muslim documents. The clay sealings produced by Arab conquerors in Egypt broke with Byzantine and Sasanian practices by displaying pictures rather than texts, but utilized motifs borrowed from Byzantine and Sasanian iconography. The strengthening of Arabicization and Islamization from the late seventh century onward gradually promoted the withdrawal of images and the exclusive use of Arabic texts on seals, which began to display features that cannot be traced to Sasanian or Byzantine practice.

In Northwestern Europe too, metallic imprints were primarily trademarks,<sup>19</sup> as illustrated specifically by the cloth seals analyzed by John Cherry whose essay brings into focus the nature of the relationship between seal materials and functions. Made of two lead discs joined by connecting strips, cloth seals were riveted through the

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**18** Sijpesteijn points out that it was common in the Sasanian empire to have slaves and captives carry a seal around their necks or on their hands. In the early Muslim empire, the practice was extended, and translated since payment of the poll-tax offered protection and peaceful co-existence with Muslims.

**19** After their renovation of the empire, the Carolingians sealed solemn documents with metallic bulls, in imitation of the Byzantine emperors, and they were in turn imitated by the Germanic emperors. Fees, "Die Siegel;" Erben, *Rombilder*.

textile, and were imprinted with information about the cloth's quality and provenance as well as the payment of tax duties. Cherry notes that European cloth seals, in use between the late thirteenth and the nineteenth century, have been discovered in far-flung parts of the medieval and modern world. Their metallic composition has ensured their durability far better than wax would have. Although early cloth seals may also have been stamped in wax, no such seals have survived. Following Cherry's lead, one may speculate about the influence lead commercial sealing from the Byzantine and Muslim empires may have had upon western usage. In any case, throughout the Middle ages, there was an internationally recognizable form of good labelling that facilitated the transnational circulation of goods. The standardization of seal materials may have been crucial for such objects, which were also expected to impart specific, local information.

In Jambi, whose eighteenth-century Islamic seals are studied by Annabel Gallop, impressions were obtained by blackening a metallic die with the flame of a wax candle, and by stamping the die and the lampblack produced on it by the soot of the flame onto a moistened piece of paper. The use of lampblack as a medium for imprinting seals was specific to the Malay Archipelago, where it remained in use for three hundred years, until it was replaced by ink in modern times. The material uniqueness of the lampblack seal imprints from South East Asia stands as a distinctive identifying cultural trait noted in 1819 by an English official present at the treaty that led to British settlement in Singapore, who remarked that "their [the Malay chiefs of the area] mode of sealing is peculiar."<sup>20</sup>

Essays in this volume have mostly focused on the seal impressions of ruling elites and their administrations whose seals, with their sensitive combination of materials and graphic features, were attuned to adjust cultural encounters with a flexibility of imitation, translation, and imposition. Given the sociology of such official seals, it is worth asking whether the private seals of common individuals who lived in multi-ethnic and multi-religious environments may have retained more composite styles, being less affected by political strategies of connectivity.<sup>21</sup>

## Sealing as Cultural Technology

The connectivity engineered by seals may be said to begin with and within their mode of production. A seal impression is an assemblage of prints left by material bodies, both human and otherwise, simultaneously coming into contact with a malleable support. Forming a nexus of durable and reliable traces, the seal impression

<sup>20</sup> Gallop, *Lasting Impressions*, 114, where the full description of lampblack sealing is given.

<sup>21</sup> Wasserstein, "Coins as Agents of Cultural Definition in Islam."

is an indexical sign, linked to its several originating agents by an actual haptic connection and its resulting combination of organic bodily marks and identifying designs. On a seal impression, marks and design are not so much represented but actually reproduced as a replicated likeness. The technique of seal imprinting thus fuses bodies and artefacts, embodiment and representation, a crucial outcome since, for the seal impression to be revealed, both the die and the hands have to be lifted up. The existence of a seal impression is predicated upon the absence of its originating cause, whose traces of agency are nevertheless indubitable.<sup>22</sup>

The modalities of seal production epitomize the transmission of likeness. Moreover, they exemplify a complex model of causality, providing explanatory patterns of inference that have been variously harnessed to formulate definitions of reality, articulate beliefs in the supernatural, and inform religious and talismanic rituals. Key metaphors inspired by seals were fundamental to Buddhism during its expansion out of India and eastward. Indeed, Copp argues, during the formative phase of Buddhism in China's later Tang empire (seventh through tenth century CE), seals circulated Indic and central Asian elements, translating them into idioms more closely related to local Chinese culture, which included long established Daoist and Confucian sealing practices. In Indic rhetoric, the seal of the Buddha was the seal of truth. Impressed on the world and on scriptures, it creates an axis of resemblance with true reality that guides the fundamental relationship between truth and appearance, and shapes modes of learning, meditation, and human behavior and interaction. Copp demonstrates that the metaphor was crossbred with the local styles of Chinese literati who transferred truth to the Chan master. Nevertheless, the metaphor of sealing deeply influenced Chinese notion of reality and extended beyond Buddhism to enter the thought of Daoism. In this encounter, the metaphorical sense shifted to a different aspect of sealing, the contrast between a single seal-die and the multiple imprints issued from it, paralleling in Daoism the unchanging and singular true reality and the imprints of its responses to the infinitely diverse phenomena of the world. As seals migrated into new intellectual contexts, their metaphorical import mutated to fit specific ontological probes but along a trajectory afforded by the properties of the seals themselves. Thus Muhammad who, as Sijpesteijn reminds us, is identified in the Qu'ran as the seal of the prophets, is positioned metaphorically as a closure, the ultimate prophet sent by God.

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**22** The metaphorical dimensions of seals and of the imprinting process in Christian culture is discussed in Bedos-Rezak, "Medieval Identity," 1522–26, *When Ego was Imago*, "Semiotic Anthropology," and "Status."

As their rhetorical valence situated seals at the confines of the spiritual and the material, they were also experienced as possible conduits for supernatural forces. In the Buddhism of Tang China, seal dies inscribed with the names of gods and buddhas were believed to channel their divine power, and were thus worn as protection, applied for healing, used in ceremonies of exorcism, and even stamped into the earth in order to rejuvenate it. Such practices had long been established in Confucianism and Daoism, from which they entered Chinese Buddhism. Nevertheless, it seems that seals became standard tools of the Daoist priesthood by the Tang period, at the end of which they were systematically incorporated into the religious rituals of Daoism. Thus, the Buddhist borrowings of existing practices fused with Buddhist imagery and conceptualization of seals, in turn reshaping Daoist sealing practices and moving them to a position of centrality within Daoist ritual. This hybrid culture of sealing optimized exchanges and facilitated diffusion, possibly promoting competition but also providing a common tool by means of which to enter relationships with the self, others, the world, and the gods across specific religions.

The exchange between the religious and the talismanic presented by Copp in Tang China indicates a fluidity absent from comparable encounters in western Christendom. In his essay, Weill-Parot considers the debate among late medieval Christian scholars surrounding the talismanic legitimacy of the astrological seals encountered in new Latin translations of Arabic texts. There they were described as obtaining magical and healing powers from the stars. Weill-Parot is particularly interested in theologians, physicians, and philosophers who addressed the issue by establishing parallels between magical and documentary seals. Those scholars arguing for a demonic source for the power of astrological seals constructed a definition of the royal seal that differentiated its semiotic logic and causal principles from that of magical seals. They stipulated two categories of irreconcilable and incomparable objects in the face of an awareness of their similarities.<sup>23</sup> Significantly, scholars invested in the legitimacy of astrological seals eschewed comparison between the two types of seals. They favored exploring the agency of Nature in imprinting stones, an agency that could be effectively transmitted by a craftsman engraving a seal in the likeness of a star at the proper astrological time under natural influences. Seals stood at the boundary of demonic and natural magic, of politics, religion and natural philosophy, serving both as powerful objects in themselves, and as concepts illuminating the ability of likeness and imprinting to channel the power of their originating referent.

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**23** For an interpretation emphasizing the semiotic and political implications of the comparison between astrological and documentary seals, Bedos-Rezak, "The Ambiguity of Representation."



## Identity and Hybridity

Deployed as a tool for thought and for establishing channels of communication between different cultures, sealing is thus thematized, in a pragmatics of recursion that generated techniques for the formation and formulation of identity.<sup>24</sup> This issue is taken up by Claudia Sode, Annabel Gallop, and Jessica Berenbeim.

Pursuing an understanding of Byzantine identity, Sode focuses on the empire between the tenth and the twelfth century, when seal usage underwent a dramatic growth, possibly associated with a revival of urban and provincial life supervised by a greater number of civil and ecclesiastical officials whose official correspondence required authentication.<sup>25</sup> Many seals from this period displayed images, rather than limiting themselves to the textual inscriptions of names, titles, and invocations that were typical of earlier Byzantine seals. Such iconographic seals mainly display holy figures and religious scenes, suggesting that personal identity manifested itself by the expressions of personal piety and apotropaic concerns. On the basis of a newer trend she identified, where some individuals introduced urban architectural imagery on their seals, Sode sees these seals as offering evidence of civic identity in Byzantium, as indicating that a sense of personal identity could arise from membership in corporate bodies such as cities. Civic identity could also appear on seals in the shape of a religious edifice or patron saint, or as poems praising a personification of the city. Nevertheless, the rarity of civic references on personal seals in the empire highlights a large consensus in locating identity within the sphere of the devotional, in conversation with holy models and divine figures.

In the Malay Archipelago of the eighteenth century, seal usage was extensive and Malay seals are a part of the substantial body of Islamic seals around the world, with which they share inscriptions in Arabic. Nevertheless, from the viewpoint of Islamic culture, Malay seals have a distinctive identity of their own, consisting of large metallic matrices, lampblack impressions, and a floral iconography reminiscent of local pre-Islamic Hindu-Buddhist artworks. Annabel Gallop explores a particular case of a historicizing seal that, introduced by the Sultan of Jambi in the mid-eighteenth century, exceptionally displays four animals in four floral petals despite the traditional avoidance of the depiction of living creatures in official Muslim contexts. The animals on this seal evoke the mythical origin of the prestigious Minangkabau kings as claimants of descent from Alexander the Great. Their patronage of the Jambi court was counterbalanced by the influence of

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**24** Macho, "Second-Order Animals," 30-32, 44.

**25** Cotsonis, "Narrative Scenes," 55.

Javanese elites, also represented on the seal by the inscription of the Javanese title of the sultan in the other petals. As a site of encounter between two rival factions, this seal's hybridity navigates several frontiers. It transgresses the custom of Islam while creating a visual mode of parity between two local factions, both of which inhabit the seal as constitutional elements of the power yielded by the sultan. Transcending the circumstances of its creation, this seal design persisted until the early twentieth century, its formula successfully embodying the unity of the state.

Jessica Berenbeim examines the medieval world of European diplomacy from the perspective of sealed documents that were exchanged between sovereigns engaged in the negotiation and ratification of treaties. She demonstrates that, irrespective of their contents, the manufacture of such documents negotiated mutually meaningful forms of authentication between transnational chancery traditions. The resulting "diplomatic aesthetic," to quote Berenbeim, was a visual hybridity, whereby incorporated aspects of all traditions involved co-existed in the documents, merging their multiple origins without universalizing them. The idea was that no diplomatic tradition was to predominate, so the exchange of treaties and ratifications constructed a world of reciprocity among rulers.<sup>26</sup> The hybridity of these state documents thus conceived of national boundaries positively, as idealized sites of equal exchange - even when, as was the case with the treaty of Troyes (1420) between the kings of England and of France, the latter was being dispossessed of his kingdom in the aftermath of military defeats.

The essays in this volume expand and transform our knowledge of medieval seals and sealing practices. They offer a panorama, not "of a world of sealing" but of sealing in the world, where seals specified and connected people, ideas, and goods, tracing transactions across boundaries of subjectivity, time, space, societies, and cultures.

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<sup>26</sup> Feldman, *Diplomacy by Design*, 13-17.

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**Abstract** Extensive geographic coverage, including China, South East Asia, Arabia, Sasanian Persia, the Muslim Empire, the Byzantine empire, and Western Europe allows the essays gathered in this volume to offer a well differentiated examination of seals and sealing practices between 400 and 1500 CE. Contributors expose rather than assume the inter-subjective, transnational, and transcultural connectivity at work within the varied processes mediated by seals and sealing – representation, authorization, identification, and transmission. These essays encourage an understanding that seals operated in liminal, transitional situations arising from legal, administrative, martial, mercantile, or diplomatic encounters, creating cross-cultural sealing networks in which adaption and accommodation underlay the force of seals as objects and images that generate sociocultural identification through mutual exchange and visual hybridity.

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**Keywords** global history, seals, archaeology, material culture, sigillography, trademarks, identity, hybridity, diplomacy, magic, Islam, Buddhism, Daoism, scholasticism

# SEALS AS CONCEPTUAL AND RITUAL TOOLS IN CHINESE BUDDHISM, CA. 600–1000 CE

PAUL COPP

AS ELSEWHERE IN the premodern world, seals—and, even more importantly, *conceptions* of seals, and of the human behaviours that featured them—were central to the practice of religion in premodern China. They are perhaps most famous in what are called the “Esoteric,” or Tantric, forms of Buddhism in China, which, as in India, feature hand gestures and bodily postures known as *mudrās*—literally “seal” in Sanskrit—a word that in Chinese is straightforwardly translated by the main word for seal (and stamp) in that language: *yin* 印. Beyond ritual postures, and again following Indic conventions, seals in the Esoteric traditions also provided central metaphors for a range of practices and ideas in the Esoteric traditions. The most startling of these is described by David Gray in a recent study of *mudrā* as a term of art in Indian Buddhist literature whereby, drawn in part from the heterosexual male imagination of seal-like sexual union, *mudrā* “designates a female deity, and later, by extension, a human female.”<sup>1</sup> Although in Chinese versions of the Esoteric traditions this particular conception was less emphasized, as we will see the intimacy of physical contact and, in particular, the physical transmission of likeness intrinsic to practices of sealing were adapted to a great variety of uses not only in Buddhism but in Daoism as well. Seals indeed—in part due to the infusion of Indic conceptions and practices—possessed a nearly unmatched richness of polysemy in Chinese religious discourse and practice.<sup>2</sup> But they did more than provide metaphors for practice: actual seals (and stamps) also had their places in the hand of Chinese religious specialists of a range of traditions and styles. Echoing both older Chinese and Indic techniques alike, seals in the period treated here (ca. 600–1000 CE, an age sometimes called “late medieval”) were key tools of ritualists, employed either as adjuncts to spells or as the delivery mechanisms of inscribed spells or talismanic texts and images. These metaphors and physical practices, and the interplay between them, are the subject of this brief survey.

The scholar attempting a cross-cultural study of conceptual and physical seals immediately encounters a difficulty: the rich semantic fields of the words *mudrā*, *yin*,

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1 Gray, “Imprints,” 422. See also Gonda, “Mudrā.”

2 On its polysemy in Indian Buddhist literature, see Gray, “Imprints,” 469–74.

and “seal” do not fully overlap, and one must be careful not to let the various senses of these terms get entangled. Let me thus begin with a brief word on important distinctions not only between *yin* and “seal” but also between Chinese and Western *studies* of seals (since my subject is China, I will not explore the uses of Indic terms or the traditions of their study in any detail). First, we can note simply that *yin* does not denote “a seal” in the sense defined by Merriam-Webster as “a tight and perfect closure.” This is true even though seals were used in China, as elsewhere, to seal things closed for various reasons. But, more importantly, this study is structured by a distinction between seals proper and a much broader category of stamps. Seals, in this study, are stamps whose forms and practices were governed by logics of personal or institutional identity; the priest’s seal, for example, bore his identity—and, by extension his power—and was thus a potent object in itself. Stamps, in contrast, were simple tools for the multiple reproduction of images or texts and bore no special significance in themselves. Whatever potency was said to inhere in them, on this view, was entirely due to the images or texts they bore.<sup>3</sup> The distinction in Chinese practice is not always a sharp one: the two are ideal types lying at opposite ends of an analytical spectrum, with some objects and practices best understood as partaking of both types. Indeed, the distinction is not usually made at all in premodern Chinese linguistic usage. In Chinese texts from the period treated here, the same term, *yin*, is used for all kinds of stamps and stamping techniques, including block printing, though seals as I define them here did, at times, have their own technical vocabulary. Furthermore, most scholars of this material have not drawn a distinction between seals and stamps, tending to call all such object seals (an exception is T. H. Barrett, a scholar who, as we will see at several points, has blazed a trail through this material that I will often follow).<sup>4</sup> Yet, despite these difficulties, I believe the distinction between seals and stamps is crucial to an understanding of the techniques and objects this article surveys.

### Seals as Conceptual Tools

We start with seals as conceptual tools, for the importance of seals in Buddhist practice and thought is clearest in the key metaphors they provided the religion as it was carried eastward out of India and transformed in various local cultures. Their

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**3** In this study, I employ a range of terms for seals, stamps, and their impressions. “Seal,” “sigil,” “seal die,” and “seal matrix” refer to seals as imprinting objects; “sealing” refers generally to the images or marks made by seals, while “impression” and “imprint” refer to those products made by either seals proper or stamps of other kinds; “sealing,” “bulla,” and—sometimes—“token” refer to physical objects (usually lumps or discs of clay or terracotta) made to carry the impressions of seals.

**4** Barrett, “Images of Printing,” 84.

pervasiveness in Buddhist thought, indeed, might be an illustration of the dictum of Henry David Thoreau: “All perception of truth is the detection of an analogy; we reason from our hands to our head.”<sup>5</sup> Such analogies in the Buddhist case concern, among other things, the nature of the Buddha’s teachings and their mastery (“Seal of Truth,” “Seal of the Dharma,” “Seal of the Buddha”), states of meditative attainment in which these teachings are realized (“*Samādhi* of the Ocean Seal”), and the relationship between teacher and student (“Mind Seal” and “Seal of Approval”), as well as the postures taken by Buddhist deities and practitioners (Skt. *mudrā*, “seal”).

Probably the most important set of seal metaphors in Buddhist thought is the one constituted by images of seals of truth or reality, which often took the name of the Buddha or of his teachings, the Dharma. In such images we see a first vivid illustration of the essential logic of seals: the extension of identity in play, as when a seal was understood to represent the person of the monarch stamped on his documents or carried by his officials. In extending the power of the throne to the object bearing it, the impression left by such royal sigils transformed what they marked with the authority and presence of the state. The official bearing the seal matrix also bore with him that authority, the aegis of which defined his own social identity. He was in this way both subsumed within the state’s protective aura and himself the granter and keeper of that protection. We see the same semiotic logic of identity extension in simpler practices, such as the use of seals as personal signatures or as merchants’ marks.<sup>6</sup> We also see it in the metaphorical Seals of Truth, of the Dharma, and of the Buddha himself that are said, in a wide range of Buddhist texts, to be stamped on scriptures as well as on the phenomena of normal human experience, which are thereby marked as identical with the deepest truths and realities told of in the religion.

One of the earliest extant descriptions of such a seal occurs in Lokakṣema’s (Zhi Loujiachen 支婁迦讖, second century CE) rendering of the *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sutra* (*Banzhou sanmei jing* 般舟三昧經), *The Meditation of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present*. Here the Buddha is describing the true nature of a seal that is to be used to seal the text of the sutra that tells of it:

What is the Seal of the Buddha? It is, namely, that which cannot act, is without cravings, without desires, without conceptual thoughts, without attachments, without aspirations, without rebirth, without preferences, birthless, nonexistent, non-grasping, non-caring, unabiding, unobstructed, nonexistent, unbound, exhausted of what exists, exhausted of desires, not

5 Thoreau, *The Journal*, 76.

6 Descriptions of the basic logics of religious seals in China include Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, 142–43; Barrett, “Images of Printing,” 84ff.; and Paper, *The Spirits Are Drunk*, 202–7, 214–15.



produced from anywhere, imperishable, indestructible, ineradicable, the essence of the Way, and the root of the Way. As to this seal, the arhats and the pratyekabuddhas cannot destroy it, cannot ruin it, and cannot impair it. Fools then doubt this seal. This seal is the Seal of the Buddha.<sup>7</sup>

In China, perhaps the most vivid and important use of the idea of the Seal of the Buddha is found in descriptions of the state of meditative consciousness known as the “*Samādhi* of the Ocean Seal” (*haiyin sanmei* 海印三昧; Skt. *sāgara-mudrā-samādhi*)—the state in which one realizes that all things are marked by the Seal of Reality. A helpful discussion is found in the *Xiu Huayan aozhi wangjin huanyuan guan* 修華嚴奧旨妄盡還源觀 (“Contemplation of How, Cultivating the Innermost Teachings of the *Huayan*, Delusions are Exhausted and One Returns to the Source”), a work attributed to the Buddhist exegete Fazang 法藏 (643–712). Here the *samādhi*, or deep state of meditative consciousness, is described as the condition wherein all phenomena of the cosmos appear in the mind as if reflected on a great ocean that has, since the “winds” of delusion have been made to cease, become perfectly still and clear. In this state, one is said to see that, despite their seeming differentiation, all phenomena are in fact “sealed” by—that is, identical with—the ocean itself, here an image both of the mind and of reality as such.

During the seventh through the tenth centuries CE, arguably the most intensely formative period of Buddhism in China, Buddhists adopted and reworked seal metaphors and added new examples of their own. Seals from this period became central to pictures of the intimate communication of truths from one mind to another (like the perfect impression of a stamp) and of the person transformed by those truths (as if by wearing a seal of authority). Most famously, seals became guiding figures of practice in the Chan 禪 tradition—better known in the West by its Japanese name, Zen—in which received metaphors, such as “mind seal” (Ch. *xinyin* 心印) and “seal of approval” (Ch. *yinke* 印可), framed the ideal spiritual careers of monks, especially in their relationships with their teachers and with the traditional past. The awakened mind of the teacher, it was said, was like a seal recreating its image perfectly in the person of the disciple, a process—in which seal impression becomes in turn seal matrix—repeated from generation to generation, and constituting a key aspect of the tradition’s self-understanding.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Banzhou sanmei jing*, trans. Lokakṣema, *T* no. 418, 13: 919b. The translation is from Harrison, *The Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sutra*, 103. I have capitalized “seal” in “Seal of the Buddha,” to make it conform to usage elsewhere in this study.

<sup>8</sup> See T. Griffith Foulk’s concise discussion of these metaphors in his definition of the term 佛心印, “Seal of the Buddha-Mind,” in the *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism* ([www.buddhism-dict.net](http://www.buddhism-dict.net)), accessed September 23, 2011.

The truths said to be embodied in the Chan teacher were also, naturally, found in the religion's scriptures. Their words, too, were at times described as seals that could be impressed into the minds of students. The *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄 ("Jingde-Era Records of the Transmission of the Light"), a foundational text of the Chan tradition presented to the Song imperial throne in 1004, speaks in just these terms when it has the influential Chan teacher Mazu 馬祖 (709–788) state that he "cites the words of the *Laṅkāvatāra sūtra* to seal the minds of living beings."<sup>9</sup> Such seals of perfect understanding, it was said, could at times also be found naturally occurring in priests of native genius, such as the monk Yongjia Xuanjue 永嘉玄覺 (665–713), whose biography in the late tenth-century collection *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 ("Song Traditions of Eminent Monks") states that, in him, the "mind-source retained its aboriginal purity; in him the complete text of the wisdom seal was present."<sup>10</sup>

Notable, too, in this period were images of mastery drawn from particular native styles of the extremely widespread practice of wearing seals at the sash or belt. The famed literatus and minister of the Tang state (618–907) Pei Xiu 裴休 (791–846), in his preface to the Chan monk Huangbo's 黃檗 (d. 850?) *Chuanxin fayao* 傳心法要 ("Essentials of the Transmission of Mind"), praised Huangbo as being one "who alone wore at his sash the seal of the Highest Vehicle that is apart from words."<sup>11</sup> A Chinese account of the nature of the practice of a Buddhist monk at Nālanda, the great monastic university of medieval India, in a related image, said that the monk "held in his palm the secret key to meditation and wore at his sash the mystic seal of the Thus-Come One."<sup>12</sup> Drawing on another long-standing Chinese practice—using seals as tokens guaranteeing the authenticity of orders on the battlefield—Zongmi 宗密 (780–841), in his *Chanyuan zhuquan ji duxu* 禪源諸詮集都序 ("Preface to the Collected Writings on the Sources of Chan"), related contemporary accounts of the "Sixth Patriarch" Huineng's bestowal of the teachings on his students in this way: "All reported that, within, he bestowed the secret words; without, he transmitted the robe as a token. Teachings and robe, given together, in this way acted as tally and seal."<sup>13</sup>

9 引楞伽經文以印衆生心地。 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, 219c (see also 246a). Jinhua Jia argues that this statement dates to sayings collected during Mazu's lifetime in the late eighth century: Jia, *The Hongzhou School of Chan Buddhism*, 119–20.

10 心源本淨智印全文。 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳, T no. 2061, 50: 758a.

11 獨佩最上乘離文字之印。 *Huangbo shan Duanji chanshi chuanxin fayao* 黃檗山斷際禪師傳心法要, T no. 2012A, 48: 379b.

12 掌定門之祕鑰佩如來之密印。 *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳, T no. 2061, 50: 714c.

13 內授密語外傳信衣衣法相資以爲符印。 *Chanyuan zhuquan ji duxu* 禪源諸詮集都序, T no. 2015, 48: 401b.

The omnipresence of such imagery in Buddhism is easy to understand. Seals had long been central to the practices of the civilizations, Indian and Chinese most prominently, in which Buddhism took on its most powerfully influential cultural forms. Indeed, beyond Buddhist Asia, seals and stamps had been in wide use for millennia in cultures “upstream” (as it were) from the seal cultures of Buddhist India and China, including those of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Mediterranean, all of which were marked at very early stages by many of the same techniques and concepts found in the much later behaviours of Chinese Buddhists. Seals—which the scholar of ancient Mesopotamia Elena Cassin has simply called “facts of civilization”<sup>14</sup>—were crucial elements in a range of early cultures: techniques for ensuring privacy in written communication; markers of good faith in political and trade relations; emblems of institutional, personal, and divine identities; and, from an early stage, tokens worn on the body or employed in rituals as talismans.<sup>15</sup> Seals were worn suspended on cords as amulets and as social markers in civilizations as disparate as those of the ancient Near East, the Graeco-Roman world, and India.<sup>16</sup> Surveying the broad connections illuminated by this material, Pierfrancesco Callieri has said that, “[in] the vast cultural domain in which the interaction of Hellenism with the civilizations of Western, Central, and Southern Asia is a constant feature, few categories of material offered me such rich possibilities for ... research on the relations between East and West as seals and sealings.”<sup>17</sup> The present brief study seeks, among other things, to demonstrate that, to the east of this landscape, we must also add China and the rest of East Asia.

Corresponding continuities in the use of seals as metaphors occur across an astonishingly vast landscape of culture and geography.<sup>18</sup> As Brigitte Bedos-Rezak

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**14** See Cassin, “Le sceau.”

**15** Dominique Charpin (*Reading and Writing in Babylon*, 92) notes that the inscriptions on the earliest Babylonian seals were prayers. For a broad study of seals focusing on East Asian practices, see Niizeki, *Tōzai yinshōshi*. For a convenient overview of ancient and medieval seal practices from around the world, see Collon, ed., *7000 Years of Seals*. For a vividly illustrated survey that focuses on later eras, see Rosaia, Ratti, and Capellini, *Les sceaux*.

**16** See Parpola, “Seals of the Greater Indus Valley,” 49; Betts, “Minoan and Mycenaean Seals,” 66; Dikshit, “Cunningham Collection,” 129; Schlingloff, “Stamp Seal,” 70; Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego Was Imago* and “From Ego to Imago”; Platt, “Making an Impression” and “Burning Butterflies;” and Callieri, *Seals and Sealings*.

**17** Callieri, *Seals and Sealings*, 11.

**18** Note that, in a seminar paper from 1997, T. H. Barrett was already calling for the Buddhist evidence of sealing, stamping, and printing to be placed within as historically broad a context as possible (Barrett, “Images of Printing,” 92–93, especially note 36). I hope this study—and the much larger one from which it is drawn—can be considered a response to this call and at least a small step in achieving this important goal.

notes, "Mesopotamian and biblical texts, Platonic and Aristotelian treatises, patristic and early medieval commentaries, all incorporate sealing imagery as a conceptual tool."<sup>19</sup> Seals, from Britain to China, were prominent in images of the relationship between teacher and student and of the human apprehension and embodiment of truth. Sealing an impression into a person, in such images, is a figure of the reformation of the person in the image of the seal, in which the seal matrix stands for the prototype, the original, whether God, in Christian examples, or, in Buddhist cases, the Buddha (or a living master understood as buddha) and the truth he awakened to. Bedos-Rezak quotes the exhortation of the Cistercian abbot of Swineshead Abbey (Linconshire), Gilbert de Hoiland (d. 1172): "Imprint yourself to him [God] so that his image may be expressed in you, make yourself conform to his seal."<sup>20</sup> Crucial to the nature of such metaphors, whether in medieval Britain or Tang China, is the intimate contact implied by it. Bedos-Rezak, describing medieval Christian cases, notes that they figured the relationship between sign and referent as being "one of origin, participation, and resemblance," in terms that are highly suggestive of the Buddhist (or, as we will see, Daoist) case:

[The] imprint forever and doubly retains the marks of its derivation. As a trace, it represents the causality of its cause; as an image, it represents the cause with respect to its likeness. This may account for the extensive use of the term *impressio* to describe the filiation, kinship, and affinity, between God and creatures marked by His imprint. *Impressio* thus came to project the notion of image as personal, as a presence which linked cognition of the self and recognition of God within oneself. It was the inner nature of man, that fabric imprinted by God, which enabled him to comprehend his "being-image" ... The imprint could not only articulate that filiation and achieve that formal resemblance (despite a difference in substance) between image and archetype which was necessary for man to be able to evolve a knowledge of God, but it could also imply that direct contact which rendered man's soul God-like as it took on the sculptural form of the divine seal.<sup>21</sup>

We see much here that echoes Chinese Buddhist conceptual seals: the intimate contact and attained resemblance implied by the image of the "mind seal," especially when it is

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19 Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego Was Imago*, 55.

20 Bedos-Rezak, "From Ego to Imago," 160–61.

21 Bedos-Rezak, "From Ego to Imago," 171, 163–64. For equally illuminating discussions of seal metaphors in the classical world, see Platt, "Making an Impression," especially 250–51, and "Burning Butterflies," *passim*.

properly understood as an integral part of “mind-to-mind transmission” in the larger Chan context; and also the “filiation, kinship, and affinity” of that transmission, effected and marked by the seal, in which one takes a position within an imagined spiritual bloodline anchored in “ancestors” (*zong* 宗, *zu* 祖). But, deeper than this, as we have seen, conceptual seals in Buddhism were often key elements in images of the structure of reality itself, in particular (and in part, no doubt, because the logic of sealing implies two entities: impressing matrix and impressed substance) of the relationship between the truly real and the merely apparently or understood-to-be real—that is, the “two truths” featured in Buddhist doctrine. In terms of seals, this relationship was perhaps most vivid in the figures of the “Seal of the Buddha” or the “Ocean Seal,” described above, wherein the infinite welter of phenomenal experience is seen as impressed with—as identical to—true reality, whether that is understood in terms of the metaphors of “emptiness,” the “one mind,” or others.

This basic conceptual figure clearly had great power in Tang China beyond the confines of Buddhist thought. The Daoist *Xuanzhu lu* 玄珠錄 (“Record of the Mysterious Pearl”), compiled by Wang Daxiao 王大霄 (*zi* Taixiao 太霄, b. ca. 671) and said to contain the writings of Wang Hui 王暉 (*hao* Xuanluan 玄覽, 626–697), makes a now familiar claim: “Moving outwards: things everywhere; entering inwards: nothing at all; all being is sealed with the talisman of emptiness ...”<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere in the work, Wang and a later commentator, whose remarks are set off here in parentheses, elaborate the trope in greater detail:

The ten thousand things are born endowed with the Way (*Dao*). However, though the ten thousand things change and differ from each other, the Way itself does not change or differ. Thus, its actions do not distort its tranquility. (Like the words carved on a seal.) Yet, since things are endowed with the Way, when things differ from each other, the Way differs in accordance with them. This is the Way responding to things. (Like words impressed on clay.) In stamping clay with a seal, the clay will bear any number of words but the original words on the seal itself are not thereby diminished. (This illustrates that the actions of the Dao do not distort its own tranquility.) One may impress any amount of clay with a seal—in all of it the words will be the same as the original words on the seal, yet those original words are not thereby diminished. (This illustrates that when things shift, the Dao for its part shifts.) Thus [the *Laozi*] says: “The more one gives, the more one has.”<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> 出則徧諸法入則一毫無持一空符以印諸有. *Xuanzhu lu* (*Daozang* ed.), 2.8b. See also Barrett, “Images of Printing,” 90n29.

<sup>23</sup> *Xuanzhu lu* 1.1a–b. I consulted and sometimes quote Barrett’s translation (Barrett, “Images of Printing,” 90).

For readers unused to Daoist rhetoric, this is perhaps an enigmatic passage. The Way (*Dao*)—that is, for Daoists, the truly real, whose nature can be studied and emulated—is likened to a cosmic seal, which, although it imprints its “words” on the infinite, and infinitely disparate, phenomena of the world, itself remains unitary and singular. That is, although the Dao-imprinted phenomena and situations of the cosmos all endlessly “change” and “shift” (in the language of the text), the Dao itself does not; it simply “responds to things,” suffusing them in whatever form they take but remaining in itself unchanged and infinitely responsive. In the final words of the passage, via a quote from chapter 81 of the *Laozi* (aka *Daodejing* 道德經)—a work of immense importance for the much later Daoist religious tradition—this unchangeability and inexhaustible responsiveness is presented as a model the adept should emulate.

While their similarities are striking, however, the contrasts revealed in medieval British and Tang Chinese seal-inspired imaginings are just as telling, and reflect the very different conceptions of the relationships between the human mind and the really real (or the divine) found in each culture. In Chinese Buddhist conceptual seals, a single all-at-once impression, figuring, in the language of the tradition, “sudden” or “primordial” enlightenment, was key to the logic of the ideas they were used to illustrate. In contrast, imprinting in the Christian cases, for Bedos-Rezak, was “a repetitive process, [warranting] gradual human reformation because it permits a progressive resemblance to the divine model. By ‘imprinting himself to God’s seal,’ man is conceived as participating in and pursuing God’s creation, while self-reformation through repeated imprinting is made possible by the presence of God’s seal within man.”<sup>24</sup> Along with the images of the Mind and Ocean Seals, or, indeed, of Wang Hui’s sealing by the Dao—all, again, governed by logics of a single all-at-once, at times even primordial stamping—we can take one final example of a Chinese account. Returning to the writings of the Tang Buddhist thinker Fazang, we see, as in his discussion of the imagery of the Ocean Seal, emphasis on the all-at-once nature of the impressions made by seals (or here perhaps more simply stamps) in illustrations of the structures of truth and of the teachings attributed to the Buddha. As in all the conceptual seals we have surveyed, the point here is not simple description but the positing of a model for thinking and for an approach to the world:

All the doctrines of the Buddha were preached together on the fourteenth day [after his awakening], at once from beginning to end, from beginning to end at once. This is just as in this world, in the method of stamping, we read texts as having meaning that proceeds from beginning to end, but when

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24 Bedos-Rezak, “From Ego to Imago,” 160–61.

they are stamped [that text] appears all at once. Yet, in this, the principles of “all at once” and “from beginning to end” do not contradict each other. You should know that the principles of this Middle Way [that is, of Buddhism] are also like this, and let it guide your thinking.<sup>25</sup>

## Seals as Ritual Tools

### Buddhist Ritual Seals in China

Turning now from philosophy to physical practices of ritual sealing, it is clear that the efficacies claimed for talismanic or otherwise spiritual seal practices also derived from the basic social logics of seals. For example, the spiritual protection said to be offered those dwelling behind a door sealed against demonic intrusion was an extension of the protection offered to the contents of envelopes or containers of trade goods by personal sigils. A seal's social power is, after all, always in part “spiritual.” As Verity Platt notes in her study of Graeco-Roman seal stones, a “seal's impression ... establishes a set of moral obligations which bind those who encounter it: to break or forge a seal is an act which everyone knows is wrong.”<sup>26</sup> The form of social magic most widespread in medieval Chinese religious seal practice was, again, that of identity. We find seal matrices inscribed with the names or images of gods and buddhas that made physically present the powers and principalities to which they were dedicated, both in their material forms of cast bronze or carved wood and in the persons of those who used them, whether they were trained ritualists employing wooden seals that they themselves had carved, or laypeople wearing sigils obtained as charms against the dangers of the road.<sup>27</sup>

In China, seals were key tools of social practice at every level, and the imagery of seals in the metaphors of the age, in both literature and social life, was correspondingly potent. In the Tang period (618–907 CE), seal use was the site of new and widespread practices of personal engagement with the world, most famously as tools in the self-fashioning and self-presentation of the

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**25** 一切佛法並於第二七日一時前後說前後一時說如世間印法讀文則句義前後印之則同時顯現同時前後理不相違當知此中道理亦爾準以思之。 *Huayan yisheng jiaoyi fenqi zhang*, 482c1–5. The translation once again in part quotes that of Barrett (“Images of Printing,” 92), who notes that Fazang likely adapted the language of what was by then a classic Buddhist metaphor featuring the imagery of lost-wax moulds.

**26** Platt, “Making an Impression,” 234.

**27** The classic Western-language study of magical seals in medieval China is Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, 123–93. More recent studies better grounded in the archaeological record include Liu, *Kaogu faxian yu zaoqi Daojiao yanjiu*, 131–74; Wang, *Daojiao fayin lingpai tan'ao*; Li, *Daojiao fayin mizang*; and Zhou, ed., *Ershi shiji chutu xiyin jicheng*.

literatus—signatures stamped on his letters and documents, and, as marks of his connoisseurship, on the paintings he owned or appreciated. In this way, to return to an example given earlier, the “seal” worn by the Chan teacher Huangbo at his belt marked him as a master in a way vividly and intimately recognizable by his and Pei Xiu’s fellow literati.

Buddhist seals and their techniques also underwent transformations in ritual practices of healing, exorcism, and spiritual liberation widespread in the culture. By at least the turn of the eighth century, stamp seals had become prominent tools in Chinese Buddhist ritual practice. Manuals from the period describe techniques that range from the stamping of healing or supernatural potencies into bodies, to those said to shatter hells beneath the earth, and to the related ceremony of “stamping sand-buddhas” (yinshafo 印沙佛) practised by local Buddhist communities at Dunhuang, wherein buddha images were stamped into stream banks at the turn of the New Year to aid in the renewal and purification of the cosmos.<sup>28</sup> Although Buddhists in China had begun to use seals in rites of exorcism and various forms of spiritual enhancement at least 300 years earlier, when the first scriptural evidence for their practices appears in the transmitted record, it was only in the early eighth century that stamps appear in iconography in the hands of bodhisattvas and as normal instruments of Buddhist practice in the accounts and ritual manuals of major Buddhist writers such as the Huayan exegete Li Tongxuan 李通玄 (ca. 635–730).<sup>29</sup> Before the eighth century seal techniques had mainly been practised and elaborated within relatively obscure rituals centring on *dhāraṇī* incantations, techniques that led to the production of native scriptures such as the *Guanding jing* 灌頂經 (the *Consecration Scripture*), the *Azhapaju guishen da jiangshang fo tuoluoni jing* 阿吒婆拘鬼神大將上佛陀羅尼經 (the *Scripture of the Dhāraṇīs of the Great Demon General Āṭavaka*), and the *Foshuo Changjuli dunü tuoluoni zhou jing* 佛說常瞿利毒女陀羅尼呪經 (the *Scripture of the Dhāraṇī-Incantations of the Poison Woman Jāṅgulī*).<sup>30</sup>

With the rise in cultural status of these practices in eighth-century China—and perhaps especially those prescribed in Buddhist incantation scriptures—seals began to appear much more prominently in the material and visual

28 Major studies of *yinshafo* include Hou, “La cérémonie”; Tan, “Yinsha, tuofo, tuota”; and Wang and Wang, “Dunhuang wenxian yinshafo wen.”

29 For a study of the iconography of seal-bearing bodhisattvas in Chinese Buddhism that focuses especially on the later Song and late imperial periods, see Sørensen and Suchan, “Seal-Bearing Bodhisattvas.” On Li Tongxuan’s account of seals, see below.

30 Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, 123–93.



components of the religion. We see them in the forms of ornate and intricate bronze “thousand buddha” stamps commissioned by wealthy officials and as simpler implements borne in the hands of sculpted and painted bodhisattvas, most often of Guanyin in one of his new guises associated with *dhāraṇī* traditions, especially his Eleven-Headed and Thousand-Armed versions.<sup>31</sup> The earliest clearly datable example is a relief sculpture of a two-armed and eleven-headed bodhisattva adorning the *Qibaotai* 七寶臺 (Tower of Seven Treasures) in the Guangzhai si 光宅寺 of Chang’an (modern Xi’an), which was commissioned around the year 703 by the Empress Wu Zetian.<sup>32</sup> In it, Guanyin holds upraised in his right hand a seal bearing the Chinese phrase *miezui* 滅罪, “Elimination of Sins,” a ritual statement that connects the image in a general way with the arcane arts of the seal practitioner, many of whose techniques, as we will see, heal through the elimination of the karmic burden of sins borne by the afflicted. Much more specifically, however, these words echo, and may have been an adaptation of, a scriptural account of another bodhisattva’s seal, one employed to stamp the sign of the successful extinction of sin onto the body of the practitioner of a form of Buddhist visionary repentance.

This seal is featured in an account from the Kashmiri monk Tanmomiduo’s 曇摩蜜多 (Dharmamitra, 356–442, active in China after 424) translation of the *Guan Xukongzang pusa jing* 觀虛空藏菩薩經 (*The Scripture on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha*), a passage that, in Wu Zetian’s day, had recently been republished in Daoshi’s 道世 (d. 683) thematic anthology of Buddhist teachings, *Fayuan zhulin* (“A Grove of Pearls from the Garden of the Dharma”). In the technique described, the practitioner is to beseech the aid of the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha, whom he has envisioned in his mind (*xiang* 想) complete with a purple-gold *maṇi* gem, or “Wish-Fulfilling Jewel,” adorning the deity’s head. The scripture claims that the practitioner will have evidence that his prayers have worked if, later, either in a dream or in a vision attained during seated meditation, the bodhisattva appears to him and stamps the practitioner’s arm with his *maṇi* gem.<sup>33</sup> The text says that the seal will be marked with “words that wipe away sin” (*chumie zi* 除罪字), but that, if one does not see these words in the dream or vision, a voice will intone from the sky that “the sins are extinguished, the sins are

31 See, for example, Wang, “Buddha Seal.”

32 Yen, “The Sculptures,” 53, 70–74. See also Wong, “The Art of Avataṃsaka Buddhism,” 8; and Sørensen and Suchan, “Seal-Bearing Bodhisattvas,” 409–10, and fig. 1.

33 One might speculate that the close connections between seals and *maṇi* gems in Buddhist ritual language and imagery, which is found across a wide body of material, may reflect the wide use of intaglio gems as seals across the ancient world.

extinguished!" (*zuimie zuimie* 罪滅罪滅), using the very words (albeit in a different order) engraved on the seal of the Qibaotai Guanyin.<sup>34</sup>

The popularity of seal-bearing bodhisattvas in Buddhist visual culture through at least the Song period (960–1279) appears to have been significant in areas ranging from the imperial capital to Dunhuang in the northwest and the Sichuan region in the southwest.<sup>35</sup> Other surviving Tang sculpted examples include a small (9.3 x 3.5 x 2.5 cm) gilt copper alloy votive statue in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago of an eleven-headed and six-armed Guanyin, who bears in his middle right hand a stamp seal (see Plates 2.1 and 2.2). Painted icons of seal-bearing bodhisattvas from the Tang and the tenth century include at least four portable silk paintings of Guanyin grasping seals bearing swastikas—an image of blessings that is among the oldest and most important of all ritual seal emblems. These paintings were among the hoard of documents and images discovered in Mogao cave 17, near the city of Dunhuang, the ancient site of caravanserai along the overland Eurasian trade routes known today as the “silk roads.” Of the four examples, three depict Thousand-Armed Guanyins: two (Stein Paintings 35 and 167) are eleven-headed and thousand-armed versions bearing their swastika seals in forward-positioned right hands; the other (Musée Guimet no. 17659) has a single head and bears its seal in a left hand at about shoulder height. The fourth (Musée Guimet no. 23076) depicts an image of a six-armed Amoghapāśa Guanyin bearing its swastika seal in its upper right hand. Perhaps the most striking image of all, and possibly the earliest of the extant painted images, is the mural of a Thousand-Armed Guanyin found in Mogao cave 148, dated as a whole to 776, where it is part of a very important program of *dhāraṇī* iconography—a fact that, along with the images just described, is striking evidence of the place of seals within Buddhist incantatory traditions.<sup>36</sup> The bodhisattva holds in one of its most prominent and forward-positioned hands a seal inscribed with what appears to be a stylized swastika (perhaps integrated within a larger design intended to suggest the Chinese talismanic glyphs known as *fu* 符, or “cloud script,” among other names).<sup>37</sup>

34 *Fayuan zhulin*, Daoshi, comp., *T* no. 2122, 53: 913c, quoting *Guan xukongzang pusa jing*, Tanmomiduo, tr., *T* no. 409, 13: 677c.

35 Sørensen and Suchan, “Seal-Bearing Bodhisattvas.”

36 On the *dhāraṇī* bodhisattva programme in this cave, see, for example, Wong, “Divergent Paths.”

37 For an image of this bodhisattva and his seal, see Copp, “Manuscript Culture,” 208. On *fu* talismans and the broader category of talismanic writing in China, see Bumbacher, *Empowered Writing*, 57–80, and *passim*.



Plate 2.1. Eleven-headed and six-armed Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara) standing on a lotus. China, Tang dynasty (618–907), ca. ninth century. Gilt copper alloy, 9.3 x 3.5 x 2.5. Gift of C. A. Islinger in memory of his mother, Helen Islinger, 1982. Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago, 1676. Photo: the Art Institute of Chicago / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 2.2. Detail of Plate 2.1: the hand bearing a stamp seal.

The Dunhuang swastika emblems mark clear connections between Tang China and cultures to its west. One can, in fact, follow swastika-bearing objects seemingly like breadcrumbs from Indic and Central Asian sites to Dunhuang and beyond to Chang'an. The British Museum, for example, has a number of coins and tokens bearing the image discovered by Aurel Stein at various sites on the trade and pilgrimage routes to the west of Dunhuang. These, as well as a large number of seals and religious stamps discovered in India and Central Asia, provide ample evidence of the ways that Tang Buddhist seal practices drew in part on cultural sources outside China.<sup>38</sup> But the evidence for Chinese sources for the practices and object figured in the bodhisattva icons is also compelling, and in many ways much more richly detailed. I explore the Indic and Central Asian sources elsewhere; in the remainder of this study I will turn my attention to the long history of ritualists' seals in China and consider the ways that the Tang Buddhist material carried this history forward in new forms.

<sup>38</sup> See my forthcoming book, *Seal and Scroll*.

### **Ritualist's Seals in Non-Buddhist China**

Seals were everywhere in Chinese culture, dating back at least to the “Springs and Autumns” and “Warring States” periods, stretching from the end of the Western Zhou Dynasty in 771 BCE to the full establishment of the Qin Empire in 221 BCE. Worn on the body or used to stamp clay bullas (*fengni* 封泥) or paper and silk documents and, later, paintings, seals were integral to a wide range of cultural practices, most prominently those of politics and commerce, but also those of romance and friendship, of connoisseurship and literati style, of Confucian ethical paths, and, most importantly for the purposes of this article, of a great variety of ways of healing, exorcism, protection, and conferring blessings.

One group of these religious seals, drawing on the logics of extended identity and power inherent in uses of royal seals, bears the names of deities or the titles of the ritualists who invoked them. The “monarchs” represented in these practices were cosmic principalities, deities, and heavenly sovereigns. Certain tombs of the first century CE in China were found to contain small bronze seals whose inscriptions point directly to their bearers’ roles as agents of deities. We find inscriptions on the seals such as “Yellow Spirit” (*huangshen* 黃神), “Seal of the Yellow Spirit” (*huangshen zhi yin* 黃神之印), “Seal of the Heavenly Thearch” (*tiandi zhi yin* 天帝之印), “Seal of the Emissary of the Yellow Spirit” (*huangshen shizhe yinzhang* 黃神使者印章), and “Spiritual Master of the Heavenly Thearch” (*tiandi shenshi* 天帝神師), among others that reflect the ancient civil and cosmic functions of imperial seals. Aside from naming the titles of their bearers and the deities for whom the seals acted as agents, some early religious seals also named the particular rites for which they were crafted: in general, they were those that summoned and commanded spirits for the ritualists’ own uses or to expel or kill them in exorcistic rites. These examples include the seals marked “High Lord of the August Heaven’s Seal for the Control of the Myriad Spirits” (*Huangtian shangdi zhi wanshen zhang* 皇天上帝制萬神章) and the “Heavenly Thearch’s Demon-Killing Seal” (*Tiandi shaqui zhi yin* 天帝殺鬼之印).

Seals bearing the phrase *Huangshen yuezhang* 黃神越章, “Conquering Emblem of the Yellow Spirit,” are among the oldest and most storied of all Chinese ritual seals.<sup>39</sup> The name invokes the renowned exorcistic might of the

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**39** I follow Donald Harper’s convincing (but as yet tentative) reading of *yue* as having the sense of “overcoming” (personal communication, July 31, 2013), which draws on usage found on a bamboo manuscript dated ca. 209 BCE, from Zhoujiatai 周家臺 tomb 30, Hubei, and then later on the verso of the Dunhuang paper manuscript known today as Pelliot chinois no. 2661, where it is found in the text *Zhu zalüe deyao chaozi yiben* 諸雜略得要抄子 (“Summation of the Various Miscellanies that Obtains Their Essentials”).

Yellow Spirit, a version of the figure later better known as the Yellow Thearch (or “Emperor”), whose association in early China with a range of demonifugic techniques is widely evidenced.<sup>40</sup> Seals with this name figure prominently in Ge Hong’s normative collection of religious lore, the *Baopuzi* 抱朴子, or *The Master Who Embraces the Unhewn*, and are singled out for excoriation by the fifth-century Buddhist monk Xuanguang 玄光 in his *Bianhuo lun* 辯惑論 (*On Delusions*). A tale of the potencies of the seal, furthermore, is contained in Du Guangting’s 杜光庭 (850–933) tenth-century collection of Daoist tales, *Daojiao lingyan ji* 道教靈驗記 (*Records of the Proven Efficacies of Daoism*). The seal remained an important ritual implement in Daoist canons beyond the Song period, a fact made clear by the place of the seal in the great ritual collection titled the *Daofa huiyuan* 道法會元 (*Collected Daoist Rites*). The history of the seal, in fact, is emblematic of the wider history of ritualists’ seals in China, which began as tools of Han-era spirit mediums and other occult masters and, over time, were borrowed by Buddhist and Daoist ritualists, and ultimately systematized within later Daoist and Buddhist traditions.

Among the earliest surviving actual examples of the seal is a Han-period stamp inscribed on two sides (Figure 2.1 a–b). Aside from “*Huangshen yuezhang*,” on its sealing face, it bears on its back a longer inscription, now largely illegible, which clearly marks the object as a demonifugic agent: the phrase “*shagui zhi yin*” 殺鬼之印 (“demon-killing seal”) is among the few readable portions remaining.<sup>41</sup> Ge Hong’s account of the *Huangshen yuezhang* seal is part of his answer to the following question: “Those who practice the Way [*weidaozhe* 為道者] often find themselves in mountains and forests, where they are in danger from tigers and wolves—how can one avoid them?” Ge Hong replies,

Those of old who entered the mountains all wore on their belts the *Huangshen yuezhang* seal.<sup>42</sup> In width it is four inches (*cun* 寸); its words

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In these cases, *yue* refers to the “overcoming” described in the “conquest sequence” of five agent theory. Compare Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, 14. Strickmann also notes that some sources, such as *Qianjin yifang*, appear to take *yuezhang* as a proper name (ibid., 318n43).

<sup>40</sup> Liu, *Kaogu faxian*, 146–47. See also Zhao, “Luoyang chutu,” 69–71. On the historical relationship between the Yellow Spirit and the Yellow Thearch, etc., see Espeset, “Latter Han Religious Mass Movements,” 1077–81, especially 1080.

<sup>41</sup> Liu, *Kaogu faxian*, 140.

<sup>42</sup> See Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, 141, for a close paraphrase of this passage. I have followed his understanding of the passage at times in my translation.

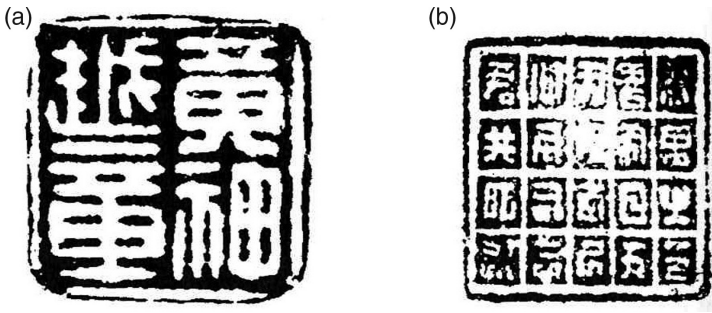


Figure 2.1a–b. Huangshen yuezhang seal, front (a) and back (b). After Wang, *Daojiao fayin lingpai tan'ao*, 20, figs. 21–1, 21–2.

number one hundred and twenty.<sup>43</sup> Use it to stamp clay bullas (*fengni* 封泥) and place them at the four directions, one hundred paces out, and neither tigers nor wolves will dare to enter it.

If, when traveling, you see fresh tiger tracks, then seal them in the same direction (*shunyin zhi* 順印之) if you want to make the tiger continue on as it was, or in the opposite direction (*niyin zhi* 逆印之) to make it turn around. Wear this seal when you travel in mountains and forests and you will not fear tigers or wolves. Not only will you not fear beasts, in fact, but should you come upon mountain and river shrines to blood-eating evil spirits, you will have the power to pass them by—take the seal and stamp clay bullas and use them to cut off their paths: they will no longer have the means to be spirits (*bu fu neng shen* 不復能神). Of old, there was a great turtle-demon (*dayuan* 大龜) that dwelled within a deep pool of the Yangzi River, which for this reason people called the Turtle-Demon Pool. This creature could perform devilries and spread illnesses among the people. In the Wu region there was a *daoshi* named Dai Bing 戴炳, who encountered it. He made a few hundred sealings in clay with his *Yue* Emblem, and then took

43 Liu Zhaorui notes that Ge Hong's description of the seal does not match excavated Han-period examples, which he takes to indicate the likelihood that *Huangshen yuezhang* seals had fallen out of use by Ge's time; not surprising, he notes, given that the cult of the Yellow Thearch itself had greatly diminished in the early medieval period—though, as we will see below, perhaps in part due to the importance of the *Baopuzi* itself, seals bearing the inscription *Huangshen yuezhang* later appear to have remained in use through at least the Song period. Thus, Liu strongly implies, the *Baopuzi*'s accounts of "ancient" practices must be used with caution, and compared carefully with excavated evidence (Liu, *Kaogu faxian*, 151); this is a point whose importance I would like to underscore.

a boat out onto the pool, dropping the sealings into it. After a good long while, the great turtle-demon—measuring over ten feet in length—floated paralyzed to the surface, where it was killed. All those afflicted with the illness were cured.<sup>44</sup>

Xuanguang's text, from a century or so later, simply mentions the seal in passing, but lets us see that it was still understood as a demon killer: "Adepts [*gaoxian* 高賢] ... make the *Huangshen yuezhang* and use it to kill demons" [*yongchi sha gui* 用持殺鬼].<sup>45</sup>

Further evidence of the seal's storied demonifugic efficacies may be seen in the tenth-century *Daojiao lingyan ji* (*Records of the Efficacies of Daoism*) tale of the madman Zhang Rang 張讓 and the Daoist adept (*daoshi*) Yuan Guizhen 袁歸真 and his seal. Zhang Rang, a native of Guizhou, was out travelling one day when he was struck down by a strange illness of the heart-mind. The symptoms at first were simple forgetfulness and a tendency to get easily lost and disoriented, but after several months their severity worsened, to the extent that Zhang was often to be seen running around naked, utterly heedless of danger, and in fact injuring himself at times. To his rescue comes a Daoist named Yuan Guizhen wielding his newly carved *Huangshen yuezhang* seal. After completing the ritual preparations, Yuan takes his seal and seals Zhang on his heart and back. Zhang reacts violently and attempts to flee, but Yuan grabs hold of him and seals him once again, causing Zhang to fall into a slumber. At this point, the tale reports, Yuan became confident of the potency of his new seal. Employing cinnabar and burning incense, Yuan seals Zhang once more upon his heart, which brings about his patient's healing: a birdlike creature climbs out of Zhang's mouth and tries to fly away, but after a short distance it falls to the ground, where it is revealed to be a great bat, upon whose back the impression of Yuan's seal is clear and distinct. Zhang Rang makes a full recovery, and we are told that Yuan Guizhen went on to heal many others with his powerful sigil.<sup>46</sup>

The presence of this tale in the *Daoist Canon* suggests that the *Huangshen yuezhang* seal had been absorbed within certain of Daoism's ritual canons by at

<sup>44</sup> *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi*, 313. For other discussions of this last use of clay sealings as "depth charges," see Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, 141; and Barrett, "The Rise and Spread," 9. For a clearly related use of a written Buddhist spell, see *Tang Dajianfu si gu sizhu fanjing dade Fazang heshang zhuan*, 284b.

<sup>45</sup> Xuanguang, *Bianhuo lun*, in Sengyou 僧祐 (445–518), comp. *Hongmingji* 弘明集 8, T no. 2102, 52: 49b.

<sup>46</sup> *Daojiao lingyan ji*, 2650–51. On this collection, see Verellen, "Evidential Miracles."



least the Tang; and the rites for the seal contained in the Ming Daoist collection *Daofa huiyuan*, as elsewhere, demonstrate its full presence later in the religion—one in which seals had played a key role since its inception.<sup>47</sup> In fact, although seals were employed in the Daoist religion from an early stage, and had become standard tools (along with spells, *fu* talismans, registers of spirits, the “Paces of Yu,” etc.) of Daoist priests by at least the Tang, scholars of Daoist seals seem unanimous in holding that the Song was the great period of their systematic absorption within the ritual systems of the religion. Li Yuanguo, for example, notes that most accounts of the nature and uses of seals in the *Daoist Canon* date to the Song and Yuan periods, and he emphasizes throughout his work the great richness of the material dating to this period (which lies beyond the purview of this survey).<sup>48</sup>

### **Buddhist Incantations and Seals in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries**

As scholars such as Michel Strickmann have shown, Chinese Buddhists had incorporated these forms of religious seal practice into their scriptures by at least the middle of the fifth century, when the compilers of the *Foshuo da guanding shenzhou jing* 佛說大灌頂神呪經, the *Great Spirit-Incantation Scripture of Consecration* (hereafter, *The Consecration Scripture*), included a chapter featuring instructions for the making and use of stamp seals bearing the names of deities, the *Foshuo guanding fumo fengyin da shenzhou jing* 佛說灌頂伏魔封印大神呪經 (“Demon-Defeating Seals of the Great Spirit-Incantation Scripture of Consecration”).<sup>49</sup> Canonization in a scripture was likely a late stage in the absorption of a new practice, however; seals borrowed from native techniques would almost certainly have been found in the repertoires of Buddhist ritualists well before their scriptural enshrinements. In turn, the new forms, infused with the imagery and ideals of Buddhist *dhāraṇī* rites, helped to reshape the seal practices of non-Buddhists in later centuries. Their ongoing presence, and at times prominence, in

<sup>47</sup> On this collection, see Schipper and Verellen, eds., *The Daoist Canon*, 1105–13. On the seal in this collection, see Wang, *Daojiao fayin*, 17. On seals in Daoism, see now Huang, “Daoist Seals, Part One.”

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Li, *Daojiao fayin*, 25–27, 16ff. See also Ren, *Daojiao zhangbiao fuyin wenhua*, 251–56.

<sup>49</sup> The best studies in a Western language of this scripture remain those of Michel Strickmann, in his article “The Consecration Sūtra” and in his book *Chinese Magical Medicine*, 132–40. The “scripture,” as scholars have pointed out, is in fact best understood as a collection of previously independent scriptures, translated by a range of people. On the life of the seventh of its scriptures in seventh-century Silla Korea, see Kim, “(Dis)Assembling the National Canon.”



Buddhist practice and iconography into the tenth century would very likely have been one reason for the new central places of seals in Daoist ritual beginning around that time.

*The Consecration Scripture* provides early evidence for new forms of religious seal practice in China that would remain important through the tenth century. Aside from corroborating the fact of their use by Chinese Buddhists in this period, the text makes clear that, by the fifth century, seals were to be made from wood, rather than bronze, the standard material of earlier seals.<sup>50</sup> This was a key innovation in seal technology, which, as Wang Yucheng has noted, allowed for their easy manufacture by individual ritualists according to local requirements and timetables, and freed them from reliance on bronze smiths and expensive materials.<sup>51</sup> Wood also enabled continuity with traditional practices of wearing seals on cords hanging from the belt, which were more and more out of date given newer trends in the Tang in both state and Daoist practice towards larger and heavier bronze seals, and eventually stone seals, representing not the individual minister but the office of the ministry itself. These seals, because of their new nature as well as their new heft, were to be kept and transported in special cases, rather than worn at the belt.<sup>52</sup> This new practice left empty a space on the person that had long been a site of identity and social power. The re-emergence of personal non-state seals in the Tang, and the great growth of their popularity in later ages, can in part be traced to this change. Connected with these new trends, wooden religious seals could still be worn comfortably on a cord, and the Dunhuang Buddhist seal manuals to be discussed shortly call for this practice—as Daoist texts also continued to do at times. Another possibility enabled by wood as a material was a new emphasis, in seal accounts, on particular kinds of wood (and other substances) to be used in the making of the seals—practices that drew on long-standing Indic and Chinese medicinal and magical traditions about the special qualities of woods such as peach, pear, aloes, and others, including the “root of the Bodhi-Tree,” the species under which Gautama is said to have sat when he awoke as the Buddha. These innovations served to bring seals more tightly within the family of amuletic objects characteristic of medieval Chinese, and Chinese Buddhist,

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<sup>50</sup> Wang (*Daojiao fayin*, 14) describes three phases in the history of ritual seals, in terms of their standard materials: bronze for early examples, bronze but also wood during the medieval period, and then stone, beginning in the Song.

<sup>51</sup> Wang, *Daojiao fayin*, 37.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* See also Wagner, “Chinese Seals,” 212.

religious and medical practice. Finally, although it was not part of ritual practice, another feature of wooden seals was the relative ease with which they could be forged, a possibility especially helpful in the faking of paintings and calligraphy, which by the Song commonly bore upon them the seal impressions of painters, collectors, and admiring literati.<sup>53</sup>

The relative freedom of the ritualist represented by (and in part made possible by) wooden seals is vividly in evidence on manuscripts from ninth- and tenth-century Dunhuang, where it is clear that it was part of a larger culture of ritual modularity and improvisation. Four manuscripts now held in the Pelliot collection at the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris (Pelliot chinois nos. 2153, 2602, 3835, and 3874) contain versions of a manual for the making and use of Buddhist talisman-seals (that is, seals inscribed with Chinese talismanic writing) that invoke the bodhisattva Guanshiyin Ruyilun 觀世音如意輪, a form of Guanyin popular in western China in the late Tang and tenth century, and the Indic deity Mañibhadra (*monibatuo* 摩尼跋陀), often a patron of travellers.<sup>54</sup> The four manuscripts containing the seal manual seem to have been handbooks composed and used by practitioners of a local style of Buddhist ritual practice strongly shaped throughout not only by Buddhist incantatory arts but also by native Chinese forms of the sort explored especially in preceding section of this study.

The seal manuals in particular appear to offer instructions for the manufacture of instruments for the practices of Buddhist ritualists steeped in the same family of techniques employed by Daoists such as Yang Guizhen with his *Huangshen yuezhang* seal. Instead of embodying the powers of the Chinese Yellow Spirit, however, they invoked Buddhist spirits such as Guanyin, Mañibhadra, and the Buddha himself; Buddhist spiritual states such as the meditative absorption known as *samādhi*; or spiritual and talismanic emblems of the tradition such as the lotus. The section on the “*padma*” (“lotus”) seal from Pelliot chinois no. 3835 (Figure 2.2) gives a representative account of the making and use of a seal from

<sup>53</sup> See Wagner, “Chinese Seals,” 210. On the problems of forgery caused by the durability of seal impressions, see Platt, “Making an Impression,” 234.

<sup>54</sup> The manuscripts lie at the heart of my forthcoming book, *Seal and Scroll*. For a preliminary study of their importance for our understanding of Chinese Buddhist practice in the ninth and tenth centuries, see Copp, “Manuscript Culture.” Other studies of one or two of the manuscript versions include Wang, *Daojiao fayin*, 41–53; Li, *Dunhuang Mijiao wenxian*, 104–17; Gao, *Zhongguo wushu shi*, 451–55; Xiao, *Daojiao yu Mizong*, 187–94; and Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, 166–69.



Figure 2.2. *Padma* seal: detail from Pelliot chinois no. 3835 verso. The inscription on the seal face reads: “Guanshiyin. The talisman is an announcement.” After Bibliothèque nationale de France, ed., *Faguo guojia tushuguan cang Dunhuang xiyu wenxian*, vol. 28, 312.

the manuals. As with the other seal accounts, it is framed as the words of Guanyin spoken to the Buddha:

World-Honored One, this seal is the *padma* seal. It has great spiritual power. Carve the seal from white sandalwood and if you seal the body, [the body] will immediately glow with great radiance and the great earth will move with the six kinds of earthquakes. If you take the seal and seal the great earth it will transform into gold and jade. Wherever you stand, if you take the seal and shine it upon the four quarters all will be made jewel-like. If one desires to see me, use the seal to seal one’s eyes—one will immediately see my true body. If one desires to see the pure lands of the ten quarters all together before one’s eyes, one must only be pure and not chaotic [in one’s body and mind]. If one is chaotic in body and mind then the seal will not work and one’s only hope is to call out to the Buddha for help.

At least three of the characteristic elements of religious seal use in medieval China are present in this account: the use of special woods chosen for their particular efficacies in ritual and medicine (elsewhere in the manuals aloeswood, birthwort, and three forms of sandalwood, including the white and purple varieties, are prescribed); the association of the seal with a deity, here the bodhisattva Guanyin, whose name is to be inscribed on the face of the stamp just as that of the Yellow Spirit was on the

*Huangshen yuezhang* seals; and the ritual gesture of “shining,” or pointing, the seal as a way of directing its potencies, recalling the ritual use of mirrors in Chinese religious practice. Such continuities with traditional accounts of native Chinese sealing rites (and they include wider connections with native claims about spells and amulets) offer especially vivid evidence, both because of their extended and explicit nature and for the simple fact that they are found in excavated sources, of the place of Buddhists within the broader Chinese culture of religious ritual practice.<sup>55</sup>

The *padma* seal, and the manuscript manuals more generally, also represent one of the most striking transformations in the nature of Buddhist seal matrices in the Tang: the increased presence on them of the Chinese religious pseudo-script known loosely as *fu*, or “talismans,” in studies of Chinese religion, and the attendant birth of the “talisman seal” (*fuyin*), which by this time had become a standard form of ritual seal in religious practice.<sup>56</sup> Note that the normal Chinese text to be inscribed on the *padma* seal, which is paired with talismanic script, explicitly labels it a *fu*, while the other seals in the manuals, though not so labelled, all feature versions of the talismanic script on their faces. Whereas earlier ritual seals, as we have seen, had tended to be in scripts legible to most educated Chinese, the combination of *fu* talisman and seal made the latter objects as mysterious and esoteric as the former.<sup>57</sup> This trend over time towards talisman seals (and, in what was likely a parallel trend, swastika seals) is evident in the Buddhist material. While the early seal inscriptions described in the *Consecration Sūtra*—simple names of deities, echoing early seal practice—were clearly to be written legibly, already by the early Tang talisman seals had become normal in Buddhism. They may have been widespread in other Tang practical traditions, as well: Sun Simiao’s 孫思邈 (trad. 581–682) *Qianjin yifang* 千金翼方 (*Ancillary Methods Worth a Thousand Gold*), for example, lists talisman seals among five techniques for emergency medical care, along with medicinal soup (*tangyao* 湯藥), acupuncture and moxibustion (*zhenjiu* 鍼灸), incantations (*jinzhou* 禁咒), and psycho-physical training (*daoyin* 導引).<sup>58</sup>

55 For broad studies of this culture, see Harper, “Warring States” (along with many other of his works); Mollier, *Buddhism and Daoism*; and Campamy, *Making Transcendents*.

56 As noted earlier, for a recent comprehensive study of *fu* talismans and talismanic writing in medieval Chinese religion, see Bumbacher, *Empowered Writing*.

57 Wang, *Daojiao fayin*, 38. It should be noted, however, that even early seals at times contained diagrams and (apparently) simple pictures, which made their distinction with the “mysteriousness” of *fu* talismans less sharp. See, for example, the *Tiandi shagui zhi yin* 天帝殺鬼之印 seals discussed in Liu, *Kaogu faxian*, 139.

58 Sun, *Qianjin yifang jiaozhu*, 813. It should be noted that *fayin* might also refer to “talismans and seals.”

### Seals as Both Conceptual and Ritual Tools

As noted earlier, ritual seals (such as *fu* talismans and other Chinese ritual instruments and techniques) were mainly absorbed within *dhāraṇī* incantation rites of Buddhism, and later within the more systematic texts and practices of the Tang (and Japanese) Esoteric traditions, which drew heavily on the earlier incantatory traditions.<sup>59</sup> Seals, indeed, were key parts of the East Asian *dhāraṇī* and Esoteric movements, and not only because of the presence of actual seals in their rites. Just as importantly, seals (drawing from the received Indic tradition) provided a chief metaphor for spells and for the natures of deities invoked in their rites. We have already seen, in the opening section of this study, some of the metaphorical functions of “seal” in Buddhist conceptions of reality and of the relationships between teachers and students. Here in the incantatory literature we see seals as foundational to conceptions of ritual action. Incantations themselves were often called seals, and *dhāraṇīs* in particular were seen in Buddhism to bear essential likenesses to seals. We see this in the term “*dhāraṇī*-seal,” common across the Buddhist world, which the scholar of Tibetan Buddhism Janet Gyatso has described as “the condensation of many symbols into one via the principles of *dhāraṇī* practice.” Spells in this sense, she goes on—and reflecting the “Seal of the Buddha” discussed earlier—“function as concrete and tangible emblems” employed to “seal all phenomena.”<sup>60</sup> These shared features of spell and seal in Buddhist incantatory literature contributed, at times, to a shared logic of ritual action and marked their membership in a tight family of ritual techniques.

A final example—that of the functional identity of stamp seal and hand seal (or *mudrā*) in Buddhist incantatory discourse and practice—sheds further light on the marriage of the conceptual and the physical at the heart of Chinese religious sealing. As Strickmann notes in his study of the early Chinese Buddhist seal texts, the authors of those works took both forms of seal to be members of the same class of thing.<sup>61</sup> Both the early scriptures studied by Strickmann and the much later Dunhuang texts tell ritualists to bring “seals,” whether carved blocks or their own interwoven fingers, to bear on clients’ bodies for much the same purposes and in much the same ways. Their common membership within the same continuum of “seal” is not only found in manuals of incantatory ritual that can seem marginal to the mainstream of medieval Chinese Buddhism (especially when they are parts of texts found only in scarce manuscript editions from peripheral locales);

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, Xiao, *Daojiaoyu Mizong*, 187, which provides a list of texts featuring seals.

<sup>60</sup> Gyatso, “Letter Magic,” 186.

<sup>61</sup> Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, 137.

it also occurs in at least one text of an elite Buddhist thinker of the cultural centre. Li Tongxuan 李通玄 (ca. 635–730), a pre-eminent exegete and philosopher of the Tang Huayan 華嚴 tradition (and a writer much cited in later Korean and Japanese Buddhism), in a comment on the referents of the words for seal, *yin* 印 and *xi* 璽, used in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* (*Huayan jing* 華嚴經), the *Flower Garland Scripture*, appears to equate three basic kinds of seals. He explains that the terms refer to “the hand-seals formed during incantation practice” (*zhouzhong jie shouyin* 咒中結手印); to the jade seals (*xi*) employed by kings; and to bronze, iron, and wooden seals (*yin*). Li associates the latter seals with precisely the kinds of Buddhist ritual stamps that are the focus of this essay, in particular the “talisman seals of Nāgārjuna, and others” (*Longshu deng fuyin* 龍樹等符印), clearly a reference to the Chinese tradition of exorcistic and therapeutic rites associated with Nāgārjuna (and separately, or often with him, of Aśvaghosa), which thrived during the Tang and Song periods. The Dunhuang Ruyilun seal manuals appear to have been part of this loose tradition; they are attributed in part to Aśvaghosa, and Nāgārjuna’s shows up in associated materials.

By far the most vivid representative, however, is the collection of talisman, seal, and other ritual methods known as the *Longshu wuming lun* 龍樹五明論 (*Nāgārjuna’s Treatise on the Five Sciences*), a fascinating manual of rites that apparently circulated widely in some form in early eighth-century China (though it survives today only in a single manuscript held in the collection of Ishiyamadera 石山寺 in Japan).<sup>62</sup> It is not possible to know if Li Tongxuan was referring specifically to some version of this text or to others in the broad family of occult techniques associated with Nāgārjuna, some of which were reported as late as the twelfth century by Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123–1202) in his *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志, where they were part of a culture of widely available demonifugic amulets and devices of various kinds.<sup>63</sup> Yet it is clear that Li saw demonifugic stamps as being forms of seals comparable to *mudrās* formed by the hands.

*Mudrās* were employed in a wide range of Esoteric and incantatory rituals in the same ways that stamp seals were. In the *Tuoluoni ji jing* 陀羅尼集經 (*Dhāraṇī Collection Scripture*), for example, a work dating from the early 650s, one finds accounts such as the description of the “Seal and Spell of the Buddha-*vajra* that stops all poisonous creatures” (*Fo bazhela zhi yiqie duchong yin zhou* 佛跋折囉止一切毒蟲印呪). After describing how to interlock the fingers of one’s two hands

<sup>62</sup> *Xin Huayan jing lun*, 895b.

<sup>63</sup> For a translation of a *Yijian zhi* passage describing occult techniques, invoking Nāgārjuna, that Hongmai claims were practised by his own brother, see Davis, *Society and the Supernatural*, 149. On the wide availability of talismans, spells, and other occult techniques in Hong Mai’s day, see Boltz, “Not by the Seal,” 266.

in a precise way and giving the spell to be intoned, the text describes how one should “seal” the afflicted area with the hand seal. Hand seals may have simply been substituted for stamp seals in certain healing rites, at least in passages such as these. The application of the hand seal is described in the text—and in many others—in the same way as that of stamp seals: “[S]eal them with the seal” (*yi yin yin zhi* 以印印之).

The use of hand seals in these rites likely contributed to the decline in the popularity of stamps, at least within the formal ritual traditions evidenced by canonical texts. Simply as a matter of convenience, after all, *mudrās* were quite literally readier to hand.<sup>64</sup> The centrality of hand seals in rituals (and texts and images) of the then burgeoning Esoteric Buddhist tradition—imported from India and Central Asia, which did not share China’s ancient culture of ritualist seals—would likely also have been a factor in this change. It is clear, at any rate, that, in transmitted texts of the seventh century and later, stamps are rarely seen, while hand seals and talismanic spell inscriptions are common. Li Tongxuan’s comments aside, the term *yin* in Buddhist ritual texts of the Tang nearly always indicates a hand seal rather than a stamp.

This is not to say that stamp seals disappeared entirely from Buddhist practice in China. Although they do seem to have vanished, at least for the most part, from the high ritual canons, their practices continued to be viable not only in the Dunhuang region (and in Japan), where ritual manuals for their use survive, but also in a much wider region, stretching at least from the Shazhou area of the northwest to Sichuan in the southwest and beyond, where paintings and sculptures from the eighth century through the end of the imperial period suggest the presence of the practice—and are further suggestive as well, especially in the cases of the multi-armed Guanyin imagery, of the continued interchangeability of stamp seal and *mudrā* in some ritual contexts.<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

Seals and ideas of seals, as this survey has begun to show, were central to many forms of medieval Chinese religious practice and thought. Moreover, essentially all elements of sealing were taken into them: the central trope of identity and the central function of physical transmission; the various styles of wearing seals and of using them to make impressions; and both seal matrices and seal impressions

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<sup>64</sup> Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, 159.

<sup>65</sup> See Sørensen and Suchan, “Seal-Bearing Bodhisattvas,” for a few later examples of seals found in Esoteric ritual manuals from China and Japan.



in various styles. The forms of everyday social magic associated with seals readily translated to Chinese religious and philosophical use.

Within Buddhism in medieval China, and reflecting its history there more generally, the use of ritual and conceptual seals was an amalgam of local Chinese and imported Indic and Central Asian practices and ideas. The history of religious seals and sealing in China, indeed, provides especially clear evidence for the transformations in eastern Eurasian religious practice that followed upon the eastward spread of Buddhism. The nature of these transformations can be understood, at least initially, through an analytical dyad with its own long history in the study of Chinese Buddhism: sinification versus Indic conquest.<sup>66</sup> From one angle, the seals and their practices provide especially clear examples of what scholars have long called the “sinification” of Buddhism—the ways that Buddhism was transformed in Chinese history to make it conform to Chinese practices and worldviews. The bodhisattva Guanyin, the Chinese form of the South Asian figure Avalokiteśvara, to take one example from this study, was reimagined in seal practices in part as a traditional Chinese healer and ritualist, wielding a stamp of the kind that—and in ways that—Chinese spirit mediums and Daoist priests had done for centuries. Indeed, as we have seen, more than simply as a Chinese ritualist, Avalokiteśvara was reimagined as a Chinese deity, his identity embodied in the form of a seal. On the more purely conceptual side, received Indic philosophical metaphors of the “Seal of the Buddha” and the “Mind Seal” were, during the period studied here, fully translated into local styles of the Chinese literatus and the Chan master, both figured as members of family lineages.

Applying the “conquest” framework, in contrast, we see that Indic images and practices just as clearly wrought profound transformations on centuries-old Chinese techniques and concepts of ritual sealing. Indic, or Indic-inspired, mudrās, or “seals,” made with the hands, replaced Chinese stamp seals in most Buddhist rituals—as well as (in material not covered in this survey) in many rites of the Daoist religion from around the year 1000 CE onwards. On the more purely conceptual side here, too, Indic Buddhist metaphors of “Buddha Seals” profoundly shaped Chinese understandings of the nature of reality. And not only in Buddhism: as this study has also shown, it found its way into Daoist religious discourse as well, providing new discourses of the very *Dao* itself.

The hybrid ways of sealing born from the marriage of Indic and Chinese practices helped to provide new and vital forms of Chinese Buddhist ritual practice in the period studied in this article. Although the prominence of physical seals in

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**66** The two frameworks are well represented by Gregory, *Tsung-mi*; and Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest*.



medieval Chinese Buddhism is most famous within the highly systematic imported versions of the religion known as Esoteric, or Tantric, it was within a much broader and looser family of localized ritual practices centring incantations, amulets, and a range of ritual techniques and objects—including seals—that this hybrid culture of seal practice had its most vibrant life. In them, Indic *mudrā* and the seals of the Chinese spirit medium were combined in artful ways, and substituted for each other in a range of practices. These objects and techniques, as this study has begun to explore, are widely evidenced in material culture and manuscript finds across East Asia. Notably, however, they are much less apparent in the elite printed scriptural canons that have mainly shaped modern understandings of the nature of Buddhism in the Chinese medieval period. Close study of Buddhist seals, in all their forms, thus helps to unearth what has long been a hidden, perhaps even a suppressed, mainstream of medieval Chinese Buddhist practice: a world of Buddhist (and Daoist) ritualists, and of the painters and sculptors who depicted them.

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*Huayan yisheng jiaoyi fenqi zhang* 華嚴一乘教義分齊章. T no. 1866.

*Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄. T no. 2076.

*Tang Dajianfu si gu sizhu fanjing dade Fazang heshang zhuan* 唐大薦福寺故寺主翻經大德法藏和尚傳. T no. 2054.

*Xin Huayan jing lun* 新華嚴經論. T no. 1739.

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**Abstract** In medieval China, this article demonstrates, nearly all forms of seals and sealing—both physical and metaphorical—were translated to use in religious practice: tropes of identity and material transmission; multiple styles of wearing and impressing seals; and the many forms of physical matrix and impression. This article focuses on the place of seals within Buddhism in China, especially within a broad family of localized ritual practices centring on incantations, amulets, and other ritual techniques and objects. Reflecting Buddhism’s history there more generally, its uses of seals were amalgams of local Chinese and imported Indic and Central Asian practices.

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**Keywords** seals, sealing, Buddhism, Daoism, China, ritual, ritualist, talismans, amulets, metaphor

# IMPRINTING POWERS: THE ASTROLOGICAL SEAL AND ITS DOCTRINAL MEANINGS IN THE LATIN WEST

NICOLAS WEILL-PAROT

FROM THE TWELFTH century to the beginning of the thirteenth, translations from Greek and Arabic into Latin brought to the Christian West texts dealing with astrological talismans.<sup>1</sup> All artefacts endowed with magical powers can be called talismans. Astrological talismans, specifically, were those made under a specific astrological configuration; or those displaying a figure representing a planet, a zodiacal sign, or constellation; or both. The making of these talismans generally involved many signs and rituals intended to communicate with a superior addressee, namely an intelligent astral spirit or entity—a type of magic that can therefore be called “addressative.” According to medieval Christian theology, demons were the only possible addressees of such rituals; although a magician could sometimes argue that the addressees were not demons but angels, or some other kind of good or neutral spirit, such a point of view was not defensible according to standard theology. Hence, from the theological point of view, any “addressative” magic was by definition unacceptable, since the only licit addressees were God and His saintly intercessors, who were obviously not involved in magical practices. Therefore, all “addressative” magic had to be banned as demonic and evil, since the only possible addressees were demons.<sup>2</sup>

Some medieval scholars, however, were eager to find a room for a naturalistic, licit, and non-addressative talismanic magic: this was precisely the task of the anonymous author of the *Speculum astronomiae* (*Mirror of the Science of the Stars*), written by the middle of the thirteenth century.<sup>3</sup> This was a normative bibliography of Greek and Arabic books, translated into Latin, concerning the different

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I thank Brigitte Bedos-Rezak for correcting my English.

**1** This article deals with astrological seals in the Latin West. Concerning the transmission of Arabic talismanic magic texts into the Latin world, see especially Pingree, “The Diffusion”; and Burnett, *Magic and Divination*. See also Weill-Parot, “Devenirs de la magie.”

**2** Weill-Parot, *Les “Images astrologiques”* and “Astral Magic.” Prior to this other concepts had been suggested, including “spiritual” magic (see Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*) and “noetic” magic (see Copenhaver, “Scholastic Philosophy,” especially 532).

**3** There was a debate concerning the authorship of the *Speculum astronomiae*. In the last few decades Paola Zambelli (*The Speculum astronomiae*) has supported the attribution of the work to Albert the Great. Bruno Roy (“Richard de Fournival”) has suggested that Richard of Fournival might have been the author. Agostino Paravicini Bagliani (*Le Speculum*



branches of the science of the stars. Its author coined the term and the concept of “astrological images” (*imagines astronomicæ*)—that is, talismans whose power was supposed to come only from the natural influence of the stars, and thus not from the demons; a long-lasting debate then arose between the supporters of this apologetic concept (such as Albert the Great, ca. 1200–1280) and its opponents (such as Thomas Aquinas, 1224/25–1274), across a wide range of disciplines: natural philosophy, theology, medicine, astrology.<sup>4</sup>

It must be noted that we can make a distinction between two main kinds of astrological talismans according to their iconographic features. The first kind bore the figure of the intended target, such as the enemy to be hurt, or the man and the woman to be induced to fall in love. Such talismans can be called “target-figured talismans”; this is the kind of talisman described in the *De imaginibus* ascribed to “Thebit” (Thabit ibn Qurra, 836–901) (note that this book was quoted in the *Speculum astronomie* to prove the existence of “astrological images”). According to Thebit, these talismans were three-dimensional images, or figurines. The second kind of talisman bore the figure of the alleged source of its power, namely a planet or a constellation (for instance, the zodiacal sign of Leo), and these can therefore be called “source-figured talismans.”<sup>5</sup>

In this study, I focus on those astrological talismans that were also said to be seals (*sigilla*), most of which were the latter kind, or “source-figured talismans.” Some medieval theologians and philosophers subsumed the study of such magical seals within a broader framework: that of the general meanings and uses associated with all seals. I therefore aim to grasp the philosophical and theological implications of the definition of a medieval seal itself in the theories surrounding the working of astrological seals: how the general understanding of what a seal *is* framed explanations of this specific kind of astrological talisman in distinctive ways. Conversely, we will also see that the inclusion of astrological seals within the general category of seals eventually forced those theologians who were arguing against talismanic magic to deal with the definition of seals in depth, to clarify their meanings and to explain how they achieved their efficacy. I will begin by surveying the different uses of the word *sigillum* in Latin texts dealing with talismans and their meaning. Second, I will argue that a representative theologian, William of Auvergne (d. 1249), was aware of the dangers of comparing magical

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astronomicæ) has concluded, after a detailed codicological analysis, that there is no solid ground to attribute the *Speculum* to Albert the Great. The *Speculum astronomie* must now be regarded therefore as anonymous.

4 Weill-Parot, *Les “Images astrologiques.”*

5 Weill-Parot, “Les images corporéiformes.” I translate the French term *talisman de cible* as “target-figured talisman” and *talisman de source* as “source-figured talisman.”

and documentary seals, because he understood that this could enable magicians to justify their use of talismans. This concern is also confirmed by an anonymous fifteenth-century theological *quaestio*, which disputes the parallel between astral influence and the sealing process. Third, I will show how Albert the Great took advantage of the distinctive features of seals to explain the astrological seal within a purely naturalistic framework. In the fifteenth century, following this line of thought, Galeotto Marzio brought to completion a naturalistic explanation for the working of astrological seals.

### Astrological *Sigilla* in Magical Texts

The most common term used to refer to a talisman was *imago* (or *ymago*), “image”: the standard Latin translation of the Arabic term *tilsam* (“talisman”), which could refer to a three-dimensional figurine, a two-dimensional image (such as a drawing) or a seal. The Latin *sigillum* usually refers to this third kind of talismanic image, namely an engraved image or seal. As noted above, the astrological seal is generally a “source-figured talisman,” on which an astrological figure, the source of the seal’s power, is engraved. The word *sigillum* is also occasionally used, however, to mean a secret symbol, or “character,” referencing a planet, a zodiacal sign, or a specific spirit.<sup>6</sup> Here, I will give priority to texts in which the term *sigillum* refers to the former, an engraved source-figured talisman, in order to better understand its meaning in this context.

An early and important example of such a text, the *Liber sigillorum*, endowed seals with great power; the nature of these seals is ambiguous (natural? artificial?). This text was attributed to a certain Theel or Techel and first appeared in Latin in twelfth-century manuscripts. Its opening words are:

In the Name of the Lord: this is the precious, great, and secret *Book of the Seals* that were made by the sons of Israel in the desert after they went out of Egypt, according to the motion and the course of the stars.<sup>7</sup>

The author explains:

Indeed, I am called Theel, because I wrote about the carving [*celatio*, i.e., *caelatio*] of gems, and not because I would have concealed [or carved, *celassem*] what God and Nature have produced; and I do not take this up

<sup>6</sup> Weill-Parot, *Les “Images astrologiques,”* 93; Grévin and Véronèse, “Les ‘caractères,’” 340–41.

<sup>7</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (hereinafter BnF), lat. 16204, 500a–b: “In nomine domini est preciosus liber magnus atque secretus sigillorum [singulorum MS] Theel que fecerunt filii Israel in deserto post exitum ab Egypto secundum motus et cursum syderum.”

for myself, but I write for you, my descendants, so that by these short and brief words you may know how many seals can be known in the nature of the stones.<sup>8</sup>

In this work, whose textual tradition is very diverse,<sup>9</sup> “the seals” refer to specific gems carved with specific figures, not all of them explicitly astrological. For instance, a seal (*sigillum*) carved in haematite is related to Saturn and represents a foaming horse and its rider holding a sceptre in his hand. This seal is useful for men who want to exert power over other people. It must be mounted on a ring made of gold or silver,<sup>10</sup> and thus acts through contact with the finger of the ring bearer.

A second exemplary text is a widespread astrological work, one of the primary sources used by the supporters of “astrological images”: the ninth *verbum* (or aphorism) of the Pseudo-Ptolemy’s *Centiloquium*, translated from Arabic to Latin several times together with its commentary by Hali (Abu Djafar Ahmad ibn Yusuf, d. 1195). In this famous *verbum*, “The faces of this world are subject to the faces of the heavens, and this is why the sages who made images used to observe the coming of the stars into the celestial figures and then they performed the due action.”<sup>11</sup> Hali’s commentary explains how the celestial Scorpio thus dominates all terrestrial scorpions, and he tells a story to illustrate this. At the time of a certain King Camorche, a Byzantine learned man was able to cure a warrior who had been bitten by a scorpion.

Straight away, he brought out from his purse some seals which smelt of incense. He gave one of them to the squire and made him drink [the melted

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**8** Ibid., 500b: “Ideo vocatus sum Theel quia de celatione, id est de sculptione gemmarum, scripsi, non ideo quod celassem quod deus et natura produxit, mihi non usurpo, vobis autem posteris meis scribo ut per hec verba parva et brevia sigilla plurima in lapidum natura cognoscantur.” Perhaps the author plays on the similarity between verbs “to carve” (classical Latin: *caelare*; medieval Latin: *celare*) and “to conceal” (*celare*), such that the meaning of the term is ambiguous.

**9** Mesler, “Medieval Lapidary.” See also the important, older analysis by Pingree, “The Diffusion,” 64–66.

**10** Paris, BnF, lat. 16204, 501a: “Sub Saturno de emathite. Si inveneris in emathite sigillum sculptum eum spumantem et fervidum et desuper virum sedentem et sceptrum in manu tenentem, hoc sigillum [hiis *add.* MS] valet hiis qui potestatem in aliis exercent, nam gratiam regendi que commissa fuerit [fuerint MS] confert et ceteras potestates gestandi faventes exhibet huius sigillum in anulo ex auro et argento composito et ad eius mensuram pondere duodecies equaliter examinato poni iubetur ut vis eius in regendo fortior inveniatur.”

**11** [Ps.-]Ptolemy, *Centiloquium*, fol. 107v: “Vultus huius seculi sunt subiecti vultibus celestibus et ideo sapientes qui imagines faciebant stellarum introitum in celestes vultus inspiciebant et tunc operabantur quod debebant.”

resin]. As soon as the squire had drunk, he was relieved of his pains. Then I looked at these seals and on each of them I saw the imprinted figure of a scorpion. I asked him how he had imprinted these figures. Then he showed me a golden ring with a bezoar-stone, in which the figure of a scorpion had been carved. I asked him at what time this stone had been engraved, and he answered: "I engraved it when the Moon was in Scorpio and when Scorpio was one of the four angles [in the horoscope figure] and with this [ring] I sealed (*sigillavi*) the warmed mastic at the same hour. I also sealed other things with this seal, because although I thought that the power was in the mastic, it [the seal itself] has been equally efficacious [when impressed on] other substances."<sup>12</sup>

The making of the seal, by engraving the figure of a scorpion on the organic stone (bezoar), is thus accomplished at the suitable astrological moment, when the constellation of Scorpio endows the terrestrial figure of the scorpion with a specific power. The mastic that received the imprint was also made under a similar astrological configuration. Four imprinting processes are performed here, two material, two virtual: (1) the figure of a scorpion is materially imprinted in a bezoar stone; (2) the power of the astral configuration is imprinted in this seal; (3) the figure of the bezoar seal is imprinted onto the hot mastic; (4) the power of the astral configuration is imprinted in the body of the patient when he drinks the dissolved mastic.

A third example comes from a tract on astrological seals that is very important to the history of their medical use. Indeed, it provided such influential physicians as Arnald of Villanova (d. 1311) and Pietro d'Abano (d. 1316) with their knowledge of astrological seals. This hermetic treatise, possibly originating in the Jewish milieu of Montpellier and sometimes associated with Arnald himself, is entitled *Liber formarum* or *Liber imaginum signorum* (*Book of Forms/Book of Images of Signs*).<sup>13</sup> It describes twelve talismanic images, each of which has to be made under one of the twelve zodiacal signs, and each supposed to cure diseases

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**12** Ibid.: "[Q]ui statim ex marsupio sigilla odorem incensi habentia extraxit eique unum porrexit et eum potare fecit statimque ut bibit armiger requieuit. Tunc ego aspexi illa sigilla et in unoquoque vidi vultum scorpionis impressum interrogavi eum cum quo illa sigillaverat. Tunc ipse ostendit mihi anulum aureum cuius lapis erat beçahar in quo scorpionis vultus sculptus erat; interrogavi eum qua hora lapidem illum sculpserat; dixit mihi: luna existente in Scorpione sculpsi, eratque scorpius unus ex quattuor angulis et sigillavi cum eo incensum masticatum in eadem hora; alia etiam quedam cum sigillo sigillavi quia putavi quod vis esset in incenso sed in aliis rebus tantundem valebat." See Weill-Parot, *Les "Images astrologiques,"* 80–83. On Pseudo-Ptolemy's *Centiloquium*, see Lemay, "Origin and Success"; and Boudet, "Les 'images astrologiques' en français."

**13** Weill-Parot, "Astrologie." See also Pingree, "Diffusion," 91–92. On the Hebrew version of this text, see Shatzmiller, "In Search"; and Leicht, "Le chapitre II, 12." On the Jewish context of

in twelve different parts of the body. The terms used to refer to these talismans, either “image” (*ymago*) or “form” (*forma*), obviously designate astrological medals or seals. Indeed, the verb *imprimere* (to imprint/impress) is explicitly used in the section explaining that the seal of Leo must be made under the sign of Leo to gain its efficacy against kidney pain: “It must be made of gold or of silver, by first carving (*sculpendo*) or imprinting (*imprimendo*) it.”<sup>14</sup> In addition, the text asserts:

Some people say that it is better [when impressed] in mastic: indeed, if it is imprinted in mastic, when the Sun is in Leo, and if it is dissolved for ten days in wine (because that is the required time) and entirely drunk, it cures every disease of the right kidney for a complete year.<sup>15</sup>

Another text, associated with the *Liber formarum*, deals with only one astrological seal, namely another seal of Leo. In several manuscripts, the name of Arnald of Villanova is given as author or commentator of this text. Here, the term *sigillum* is explicitly used: “And you must tie this seal (*sigillum*) to the loins near the kidneys.”<sup>16</sup> This same text also recounts an eyewitness experience very similar to that reported in Hali’s commentary.

I also saw a physician who sealed aromatic gum with this seal, as if it were wax, and who gave this sealed [substance] to [the patient] to drink, and [the patient] was immediately relieved. Indeed, I personally managed to seal, according to this method, pills made with the blood of a goat; and they worked wonderfully.<sup>17</sup>

All these texts suggest different possible uses of these seals: external contact, by belting the seal around the loins (Arnald of Villanova was said to have cured Pope Boniface VIII in this way, in 1301); or internal contact, when a patient imbibes the dissolved seal.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly enough, these three examples of astrological seals

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the diffusion of such kind of texts, see Schwartz, “La magie astrale.” I am preparing a critical edition of the Latin versions of the *Liber formarum* and associated texts on the seal of Leo.

**14** Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (hereafter BSB), Clm 7576, fol. 18rb: “Et fiat ex auro vel argento et fiat sculpendo vel imprimendo primo ictu.”

**15** Ibid.: “Aliqui qui experti sunt dicunt quod melius est de mastiche: dicunt enim quod si imprimatur in mastice Sole existente in Leone et tempore necessitatis remoliat per 10 dies in vino et bibatur, totum curat omnem morbum renis destri per totum annum.”

**16** Ibid., fol. 18ra: “Et hoc sigillum ligabis in lumbi circa renes.”

**17** Ibid., fols. 18rb–va: “Vidi eciam quemdam medicum sigillantem sigillo illo olibano tamquam cera et illud sigillum dabat in potum patienti et statim liberabatur. Ego feci sigilari troiscos de sanguine hirci [irich? MS] secundum doctrinam illam factos et operabantur miraculose.”

**18** Another later text, entitled *De sigillis* and falsely ascribed to Arnald of Villanova, contains addressative para-Christian rituals and inscriptions. It has been edited by Federici Vescovini,

refer not to practitioners from Islam but, rather, to Byzantine or Jewish milieus. Theel's lapidary may have some Arabic parallels, but some pieces of evidence found in the Latin version seem to show that this version "came directly from a Byzantine exemplar."<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the legendary author (Theel) introduces himself as a Jew. Hali's commentary was translated from Arabic, but it nevertheless describes the ministrations of a Byzantine physician. As for the *Liber formarum*, it originated in the Jewish community of Montpellier.<sup>20</sup>

Another text provides valuable insight into how such recipes, based on the *Liber formarum*, were actually used by some medical practitioners. In 1381 a Spanish physician called Estéfano wrote in Castilian a work entitled *On the Visitation and Consultation of Physicians* (*De la visitaçion e consiliaçion de los medicos*) at the request of Pedro Gómez Barroso, bishop of Seville. In the health regimen that Estéfano prescribed for the bishop (the first part of the work), he describes the vessels from which his patient must drink. Because the bishop suffers from stomach ache, a golden cup should be made when the Sun is in Virgo, at the hour of the Sun with other beneficial astrological conditions, and suffumigated with "male frankincense" (*tus masculino*).

Once the cup has been made, a golden seal (*ssello de oro*) must be made when the Sun is in the first decan of Libra and the Moon is crescent during the first five hours of the day of Jupiter [i.e., Thursday]. This seal must represent the figure of a man who carries scales in one hand and, in the other, a bird, half black and half white. And once this seal has been imprinted on the enamelled surface of the cup, it will provide greater relief of gastric pain than any other kind of corporeal medicine, according to the astrologers in the books of secrets, and as Arnald said in his *Treatise on Seals: Experiments of the Experiments*, in the chapter "against the stomach ache." And thus Albert also said in his book on secrets: the treatise on seals. And my lord must drink his venerable drink from this precious cup full of power.<sup>21</sup>

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"I sigilli." On the rejection of Arnald's authorship, see Weill-Parot, *Les "Images astrologiques,"* 477–90, and "Astrologie, médecine." On Arnald of Villanova, astrology, and seals, see also Giral, "Arnaldus Astrologus?"

19 Mesler, "Medieval Lapidary," 93–95.

20 The second text, dealing with another seal of Leo, could have been translated from Arabic, however: Weill-Parot, "Astrologie, médecine."

21 Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, 18052, col. 113: "La ffabrica fecha del uaso, ssea despues fecho un ssello de oro, el ssol estando en la primera ffaz de Libra, luna crescente in dia de Jupiter en las cinco oras primeras ssea fecho el ssello en el ffigurado un omen que tiene en la una mano un peso e en la otra un aue que ssea medio negra e medio blanca. E puesto este ssello en logar de esmalte enel vaso, grant profico a la passion

Thus the whole cup is an astrological talisman whose power is perfected by a second talismanic process based on an astrological seal. This seal acts through three successive imprintings. First, the seal as a matrix stamps its form on the cup. Second, the imprinted image produces an effect on the drink within the cup. Finally, the imprinted drink acts upon the body of the drinker. Estéfano explicitly references two sources: the *Liber formarum* associated with Arnald and, possibly, the *De mineralibus* (*On Minerals*) by Albert the Great.<sup>22</sup>

These salient examples show how the practice of seal making and imprinting in an astrological-magical context was based on a faith in the combined power of a double imprinting: that of the seal's figure and that of the astral power it channelled. For their part, theologians knew the strong metaphorical potential of the seal. One of them, William of Auvergne, perceived that magicians could misuse this kind of metaphor in order to justify their talismanic practice.

### The Misuse of Sealing Metaphors and Astrological Imprinting

The seal has always served a metaphorical purpose, and it continued to do so in medieval Christian theology.<sup>23</sup> For example, Peter Abelard (1079–1142) drew an analogy with the seal in order to understand the Trinity, arguing that God the Father made Christ in His image, like an engraving on a seal matrix, and that Christ leaves his seal, the Holy Spirit, on the world.<sup>24</sup> A seal necessarily implies two different signifying modes: first, the very process of sealing and imprinting itself; and, second, the resemblance between the model (the matrix) and the imprinted image (which is the seal referring to the model).

In his treatise *De universo*, however, William of Auvergne (ca. 1180–1249), bishop of Paris, ultimately rejected any attempt to draw a parallel between the astrological seal and a seal such as the royal seal. William uses the term *imago*, and not *sigillum*, as he does not deal with the process of imprinting (i.e., the first of the

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estomatica sse le sseguira mas que ninguna de las medeçinas otras corporales, ssegunt los estrolagos, in libris ssecretorum, ut ait Arnaldos in spiramentis sperimentorum tractado de ssegillos, titulo contra dolore estomachi. Eçiam beatus Albertus in ssuo libro ssecretorum tractato de ssegellis. E con este vaso preçioso e muy virtuoso, beva el dicho ssennor el ssu venerable beuer." See also Weill-Parot, *Les "Images astrologiques,"* 538–42. This text was first discovered by Guy Beaujouan: see *La Science*, 22–23, and "Manuscripts médicaux," 180.

<sup>22</sup> But note also that a *Tractatus de sigillo et anulo Leonis et eius virtutibus* ascribed to Albert the Great is also mentioned by Pingree, "Diffusion," 92 and note 112.

<sup>23</sup> Bedos-Rezak, "Le sceau."

<sup>24</sup> Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego Was Imago*, 125–30, 147–49, 188–89, and "Semiotic Anthropology."

two aforementioned signifying modes).<sup>25</sup> Before addressing this essential section of *De universo*, it is important to reference another work by William, *De legibus*, in which he makes a clear distinction between the idolatrous use of magical figures and characters (*characteres*) and the Christian use of sacred objects blessed by the Church. He writes that the power of sacred objects (such as that of a waxen lamb, blessed by the Pope, which protects from lightning) derives from the power of God Almighty. The wax itself has no power. Here, he also makes a comparison with the royal seal:

Just so the royal seal (*sigillum*) or any other kind of displayed sign of authority protects the bearers [of it] and makes them secure so that they cannot be damaged by those who are subject to the king, not because of [its own] virtue [i.e., the virtue of the seal] but by the power and will of the king, so these things or signs preserve the bearers [of them] and keep them unharmed by the aforesaid damages, not because of some virtue stemming from these aforesaid things, but because of the omnipotent virtue and goodwill of the Creator.<sup>26</sup>

So the power of the royal seal derives only from its semiological function (as a sign of the king's power), not from any power acquired by the material itself.

The semiological function of the astrological seal is the key idea, according to the theologian's view; it leads the theologian to conclude that its power must necessarily come from demons: the seal is nothing but a sign addressed to demons.<sup>27</sup> According to William in *De universo*, the supporters of astrological talismans argue that "the image (*imago*) of the king, although it is completely dead, since it is made of wax, lead, or gold, is able to move living beings" because it "inclines their will to fulfil the royal will" and so performs action through the "power of the living image of the king." Similarly, astrological talismans are "the images (*imagines*) of celestial images (*imaginum caelestium*)" that are alive; hence, the (dead) talismanic images act through the power of the living celestial images. As "evidence" for this argument, those magicians could quote the ninth *verbum*

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**25** Weill-Parot, *Les "Images astrologiques,"* 175–212. On William of Auvergne and magic, see, in particular, Thorndike, *A History of Magic*, vol. 2, 338–71; Marrone, "William of Auvergne" and *A History of Science*, 85–97; and Sannino, "Ermete mago."

**26** William of Auvergne, *De legibus*, cap. 27, 87 a (C): "Sicut ergo regale sigillum, seu aliud quodcunque signum ducatus tuetur deferentes, et securos efficit, ne eis noceatur ab his, qui regi subsunt, et hoc non sua virtute, sed potestate regia, et voluntate; similiter hujusmodi res vel signa non ex virtute aliqua, quae ex eis sit, sed omnipotentis virtute, et beneplacito creatoris, illaesos a praeonominitis nocumentis protegent se portantes."

**27** On another theological significant issue, see Courtenay, "The King."



of Pseudo-Ptolemy's *Centiloquium*.<sup>28</sup> William accordingly rejects this parallel and argues that the royal seal's efficacy depends on the perception of those who act in accordance with it.<sup>29</sup> By contrast, the astrological seal acts without that perception. Often, indeed, the talisman is buried or otherwise hidden. William also puts forward another, stronger argument against any analogy with the royal seal. He recounts that supporters of talismanic astral images attribute their power either to their likeness to celestial images or to the fact that they were made during astral rulings and at the appropriate astrological moment.<sup>30</sup> We recognize here the two criteria that later will define an "astrological image." If we follow the first hypothesis, William contends, and apply it to the royal seal, it would mean that an image of the king would force his subjects to obey *ex necessitate*; and that nobody could resist, which is wrong.<sup>31</sup> If we defend the second hypothesis with reference to the royal seal, we see that its implications would not be true either. Indeed, the making of the image under the ruling celestial image can be understood in two ways: either the maker of the image, while operating, venerated the celestial image, or he made it while the celestial image was in a good astrological position (*exaltatio, fortuna*). The first understanding leads to an absurdity: an image of a king can be made while the craftsman is highly venerating him, but this is not the reason why all his subjects will obey him, especially if the image is buried or hidden. Concerning the second understanding, it must be answered that, prosperous and happy though

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**28** William of Auvergne, *De universo*, I.1.46, 660 b (E): "Quomodo imago mortua et omni modo inapprehensa, omnique modo immobilis moveret viventes? aut qualiter praestaret scientiam, quam nec habuit, nec actu, nec potentia eam habere certissimum est? Quod si dixerit, quia sicut imago regis omnino mortua, ut pote, vel cerea, vel plumbea, vel aurea movet imagines viventes, et homines et inclinat voluntates eorum ad faciendam voluntatem regiam, et hoc facit virtute imaginis vivae, quae rex est: sic imagines huiusmodi, quia imagines sunt imaginum coelestium, quae utique vivae sunt, ut ipsi ponunt, virtute illarum, scilicet coelestium, faciunt omnia haec, et hoc est, quod dicit Ptolemaeus in libro centum verborum, quem vocat *Centiloquium*, quia imagines terrestres subditae sunt coelestibus virtutibus et eis obediunt."

**29** Ibid., 660 b (E): "In hoc facillimum est respondere, quoniam imagines regaliū sigillorum, nisi apprehensae sint, neminem movent, nisi motu apprehensionis, neque ad voluntatem regiam faciendam, nisi ipsa voluntas regia, vel scriptura, cui appensa sit imago regia, vel aliquo modo innotescat."

**30** Ibid., 662 b (E–F): "Amplius. Coelestes imagines si praestant sic factis imaginibus secundum hunc errorem praeinominatas virtutes, aut hoc est, quia imagines earum sunt, aut quia sic sunt sub eis factae, quod est dicere, quia imagines sunt tam virtuosarum imaginum, aut quia sub potentia et ducatu earum factae."

**31** Ibid., 662 b (F): "Siquidem quia tam virtuosarum imaginum imagines sunt, tunc imago regis alicujus ex necessitate posset in toto regno ipsius et obediret ei in regno illo quicquid obedit regi, et ad hunc modum de unoquoque principe et duce contra quod non oportet aliquem disputare."

a king may be when his image is made, no special power will be received by this image as a result.<sup>32</sup>

For William of Auvergne, the parallel drawn between the royal seal and the astrological seal does not work. By discarding this comparison between a royal seal and an astrological seal, he aims to preclude any naturalistic explanation or justification for astrological talismans.<sup>33</sup> Both talismanic power and seal efficacy work through a semiological process, but there is a decisive difference between these two operations. In the case of a royal seal, the king is the obvious referent of the seal. In the case of the astrological seal, the referent is hidden: it is a demon, even though the image seems to refer to a planet or a constellation. The talismanic process produces a fake and inefficacious similarity between the image and its model (the planet or constellation) and a real and evilly efficacious semiology of a sign referring to the demon. The astrological seal is a sign through which the magician worships the demon. Hence, the demon is eager to fulfil the operation in order to make the magician fall into damnation.

As noted above, William does not take into account the imprinting process, the first aspect of the seal's metaphorical power, probably because his demonstration does not require it. But, as we have seen, the idea of the astrological seal implies the combination of two imprinting processes: the magician imprints an image to make a talisman and, at the same time, the constellation is supposed to imprint its power on this talisman. The verb *imprimere* (or its substantive *impressio*) can have different meanings, several of which are combined in the explanation of the astrological seal.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, when Thomas Aquinas addresses the question of astrological talismans, he refers to them as "bodies in which those figures are imprinted (*impressae*)."<sup>35</sup> Elsewhere, however, he uses the same term to refer to the influence

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**32** Ibid., 662 b (F): "Si vero, quia sub huiusmodi imagine facta, aut intelligit sub veneratione, aut intelligit sub exaltatione, sive sub fortuna illius, hoc est, cum bene se habet in figura coeli, videlicet in ascensione et aspectibus et tunc neutra via effugiet, quin destrueretur error iste per exemplum praemisum. Sub quantacunque enim veneratione regis fiat ejus imago, non propter hoc obediunt ei totum regnum illius, maxime si abscondita fuerit, vel sepulta. Similiter quantumcunque bene, prospere et foeliciter se habente rege facta fuerit imago ejus, non propter hoc aliquid potentiae, vel virtutis acquireretur imagini illi."

**33** The concept of "astrological image" was invented by the author of *Speculum astronomiae* (see above), but William of Auvergne had already imagined such a concept in order to reject it: Weill-Parot, *Les "Images astrologiques,"* 191. See also Perrone Compagni, "I testi magici."

**34** On a study of many meanings of "impressio" and "imprimere", see Jacquart, "De l'arabe au latin"; and Weill-Parot, *Les "Images astrologiques,"* 363–74.

**35** Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, III.105.§10: "Item. Per figuras, non disponitur aliquid materia naturalis ad formam, ut ostensum est. Corpora igitur in quibus sunt impressae huiusmodi figurae, sunt eiusdem habilitatis ad recipiendam influentiam caelestem cum aliis corporibus eiusdem speciei."

of the stars on the sublunary world. Thus, Thomas asserts that “celestial bodies make no impression on our intellects,”<sup>36</sup> or he quotes a wrong argument (which he will rebuke) that “the mover of the celestial body is nobler than the mover of the human body, and capable of imprinting on [the mover of the human body]; and similarly the celestial body [is capable of imprinting] on the human body,” and so the acts of free will depend on the celestial motion.<sup>37</sup>

In a manuscript from the second half of the fifteenth century, now held at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, a section of an anonymous theological text is especially devoted to the rejection of a comparison between the sealing process (in its broader meaning) and celestial influence. It is part of a scholastic *quaestio* for formal disputation, probably debated at the University of Paris: “Whether astrologers and observations of natural days must be considered heretical” (*Utrum mathematici et dierum naturalium observationes sint heretici censendi*).<sup>38</sup>

You confirm this argument thus: as the astrologers say, the relationship between the wax already imprinted and the silver seal [matrix] is similar to that between the sphere of generated beings and the chart of the heavens. But in the wax impressed by a seal, nothing, even the least point, is deprived of its cause and meaning in the silver seal itself, as is the case with the seal of the Holy Faculty of Theology. Thus, in this inferior sphere, there is no effect that is deprived of its cause and its signifier in the chart of the heavens; and this seems substantially consonant with what the Holy Doctor [i.e., Thomas Aquinas] said in the first part of the *Summa* [*Theologiae*]. To this argument put forward to confirm this idea, I reply that there is not an entire similarity between the figure imprinted on the wax by the seal and the actual impression of the chart of the heavens on inferior things. For the figure of the seal is the entire particular cause of this imprint on the wax, whereas the chart of the heavens is not the entire cause of the accidental effects in this inferior world. Indeed, inferior things have a causality distinct from the causality of

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**36** Ibid., III.84: “Quod corpora caelestia non imprimant in intellectus nostros.”

**37** Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis*, lib. II, d. 15, q. 1, a. 3, arg. 3: “Praeterea, sicut se habet movens et mobile ad aliud movens et mobile; ita se habet motus ad motum. Sed motor corporis caelestis est nobilior motore corporis humani, et potens in ipsum imprimere; et similiter corpus caeleste in corpus humanum. Ergo et motus caelestis est aliquo modo causa operum humanorum, quae ex libero dependent arbitrio.”

**38** Munich, BSB, Clm 602, fol. 1ra–13va. On this *quaestio*, see Thorndike, *A History of Magic*, vol. 4, 526n45; and Weill-Parot, *Les “Images astrologiques,”* 366n59. The manuscript is described in Juste, *Les manuscrits astrologiques*, 77–78. “Natural day” is astronomical term referring to the time taken by the Sun to come back to its initial point in its daily observable motion from East to West.

superior things, and hence the chart of one aspect of the heavens is only a universal and not sufficient cause, which can be removed, reduced, intensified in the production of its effects by these inferior things. For regardless of the ruling constellation, fire would heat anything capable of being heated and brought close to it. And I say that if the wax is larger than the seal, it can have and receive some imprint from anything other than the seal; so I say that the extent of the effects here in the inferior world is greater than the influence of the celestial bodies. Thus says the 29th article of this Faculty's [list] of articles, which were published on the 19th of September 1398 during the time of Charles VI: [to say] that the thoughts of our minds and our internal wills are caused immediately by the heavens is an error.<sup>39</sup>

The anonymous theologian rejects any theory based on the metaphor of the seal that would grant too much to astral influence and lead to astrological determinism. He discards the comparison on the grounds that the causation in the sealing process is too strong, too exclusive to be applied to the astral influence. The seal is the unique cause for the imprint in the wax, whereas we cannot say that a given constellation is the sole cause of sublunary events, because that would imply the existence of a fatalistic astrological framework. Thus, the theologian allots a relative autonomy to the sublunary causality and even asserts that causation in this inferior world is more efficacious than the influence of the stars.

This *quaestio* refers twice to theological condemnations issued in Paris. The latter refers explicitly to the condemnations of magic in 1398, which were published along with the condemnation of the magician Jean de Bar, who had

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**39** Munich, BSB, Clm 602, fol. 5va–vb: “Confirmatis istam rationem sic: ut dicunt mathematici, sicut se habet cera iam impressa ad sigillum suum argenteum, sic se habet hec spera generabilium ad faciem celi. Sed in cera a sigillo impressa nichil est, etiam minimum iota, quin habeat suam causam suumque significativum in ipso argenteo sigillo: utputa [utrumque MS] in sigillo sacre facultatis theologie; ergo in hac inferiori spera nullus est effectus qui non habeat suam causam et suum significatorem in facie celi; et hoc substantialiter sonare videtur Doctor Sanctus in prima parte *Summe*. Ad confirmationem dico quod non est omnino simile de figura cere impressae a sigillo et effectu impresso istis inferioribus a facie celi. Nam figura sigilli est tota particularis causa impressionis in cera. Facies vero celi non est tota causa effectuum hic inferius accidentium. Inferiores enim res habent causalitatem distinctam a causalitate superiorum et sic facies unius aspectus celi non est nisi causa universalis non sufficiens que ab istis inferioribus tolli, remitti, intendi quoad effectus productionem potest. Quicumque enim viget constellacio ignis calefaceret calefactibile approximatum et dico quod si cera sit laciore sigillo, potest habere et recipere aliquam impressionem ab alio quam sigillo, modo dico quod latitudo effectuum hic inferius est maior influxu corporum celestium quia dicit 27 articulus facultatis inter articulos qui facti fuerunt anno 1398 die decima nonas septembris tempore Karoli sexti quod *cogitationes nostre intellectuales et voliciones interiorum inmediate causentur a celo est error*.” I thank Maria Sorokina for her useful suggestions in the reading of this text.

unsuccessfully attempted to cure King Charles VI of his madness.<sup>40</sup> The former is an implicit reference to the famous *Syllabus* published by Étienne Tempier, former chancellor of the university (1263–1268) and later bishop of Paris (1268–1279). Issued in 1277, the *Syllabus* condemned (among other things) some “extreme” peripatetic theories allegedly held by some masters and students of the Faculty of Arts. One of the condemned propositions said that, “[i]f the heavens should stand [still], fire would not act on tow [or flax], because nature would cease to operate.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, all inferior events (e.g., the burning of a piece of tow) could occur because of the motion of the heavens, a proposition condemned for its apparent disregard for the absolute power of God. Although this *quaestio* does not deal with the art of astrological seals (but with one of its major premises, namely astral influence), its anonymous theologian rejects the comparison between astral influence and the sealing process and so indirectly undermines one of the ways to justify astrological seals. His argument thus converges with William of Auvergne’s direct attack on magicians.

### **The Seal or Source-Figured Talisman: The Most Easily Justifiable “Astrological Image”**

Despite these arguments against astrological seals, other medieval theologians and philosophers persisted in justifying them and tried to provide naturalistic explanations that would enable them to remain within the framework of official Church doctrine. In doing so, they often used the distinctive features of the seal to build up an argument according to the requirements of scholastic natural philosophy. One of the most comprehensive of these arguments was provided by the German Dominican Albert the Great in his *De mineralibus* (*On Minerals*, ca. 1256), a book entirely devoted to the scientific study of stones and metals. His explanation works especially for the astrological seals whose power originates in the images represented (source-figured images). Albert addresses the many properties of the stones, particularly the wonderful powers ascribed to specific stones, especially gems. Then he deals with stones found in nature that bear naturally imprinted

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<sup>40</sup> Ed. by Boudet in “Les condamnations,” 151: “Vicesimus septimus articulus: quod cogitationes nostre intellectuales et volitiones interiores immediate causentur a celo, et quod per aliquam traditionem magicam tales possunt sciri, et quod per illam de eis certitudinaliter judicare sit licitum. Error.”

<sup>41</sup> Ed. by Piché in *La Condamnation parisienne*, 126–27n156 (79): “Quod si celum staret, ignis in stupam non ageret, quia natura deesset”; the English translation of the proposition is borrowed from Grant, *Planets, Stars, and Orbs*, 595–96. For recent research on some scholastic discussions on this topic, see Sorokina and Schabel, “Le feu brûlerait-il l’étoupe?”

figures, asserting that the stars and constellations can imprint such figures in certain stones, especially gems. For example, the sign of Cancer can produce, when this constellation is ruling, a figure of Cancer in a gem, thus forming a natural seal. The constellation can also lend specific powers to these figured gems through the same natural process. The whole process is entirely natural. Both the figure imprinted and its power come from the same natural cause: the influence of a certain star or zodiacal sign at a specific moment. Such natural astrological seals belong to the category of natural wonders, not of magic. Magic begins only when the process is instigated by man.

Albert also extended this argument to man-made astrological seals, however—that is, to purely astrological talismans, later known as “astrological images” according to the definition coined in the *Speculum astronomiae*. These seals were made by human artifice, engraved in stones or gems and endowed with astral powers. In this case, a difficulty arises, since there is a gap between the two processes. On the one hand, the craftsman produces, for instance, the figure of Cancer in a gem. On the other hand, the constellation is supposed to give a natural power to this seal, namely the power to relieve warm and dry fevers. This seems to imply the absurd premise that the stars obey the will of man. According to the medieval philosophical and theological framework, man is not supposed to equal or overcome nature. Instead, his products are only imperfect imitations of nature.<sup>42</sup> Man does not have the power to create new substantial forms; this is the monopoly of God and His instrument, nature.

In order to solve this problem, Albert explains that, when the craftsman makes an astrological seal, he chooses the appropriate astrological moment—just as the astrologer makes “astrological elections” by choosing the suitable astrological time to undertake a specific action. Thus the craftsman puts his action (the making of the talisman) under the influence of the ruling astrological figure, so that he himself becomes the instrument of the stars. He becomes a link in the natural causative chain, which originates in God, runs through the specific astrological figure, and terminates in the artificial talisman. Thus, a given constellation is able to produce a powerful astrological seal on its own, but sometimes the process needs the instrumental help of man. In both cases, the real primary cause remains the star, whereas the craftsman is only an instrumental cause. Hence, the hierarchy between human action and nature (God’s instrument) is preserved. The power of the seal is bestowed in the course of nature (*cursus naturae*), just like the power of a natural seal.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> See, in particular, Muratova, “*Imitatio naturae*”; and Obrist, “Art et nature.”

<sup>43</sup> Weill-Parot, “Causalité astrale.”

Albert's Dominican colleague and younger contemporary, Thomas Aquinas, took the opposite position. He rejected the concept of "astrological image" in all his works. According to his view, all talismans are addressative, their figures being signs addressed to demons, who are the real agents of a magical operation. The only difference between "nigromantic" images and the alleged "astrological images" was that the address to demons was explicit in the first instance, implicit in the second. Nevertheless, in a final section of chapter 105 in the third book of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, Thomas offered what could appear to be a concession to the supporters of "astrological images." Since a figure is "like a specific form"—that is, a form that makes something belong to a given species—the making of a figure, not *as* a figure but as giving some specificity to the artificial object, could lead to the reception of a specific celestial influence.<sup>44</sup> In my opinion, these few lines are no more than a methodological stage in Thomas's comprehensive examination of all the possibilities raised by the issue under consideration; they do not mean that he was ready to countenance talismanic art.

The "astrological image," be it a figurine or a seal, was conceptualized within the hylomorphic frame of Aristotelian philosophy, which held that every being is compounded of matter and form.<sup>45</sup> Hence, the talisman was basically a figure, an artificial form embedded in matter. The task for the supporters of "astrological images" was, therefore, to establish a correspondence between two sets of relationships: the rapport between artificial figure and matter, versus the rapport between natural form and matter. In other words, they had to give an ontological reality to the artificial form, as if it were a quasi-substantial or quasi-specific form (Thomas wrote "*quasi formae specifice*"). In this process, the demonstration was a bit easier for the source-figured talisman (the astrological seal) than for the target-figured talisman (such as figurines for a bewitchment). As we have seen, Albert the Great's explanation dealt with the source-figured astrological seal.

In the fifteenth century, however, the supporters of "astrological images" seized on the opportunity that Thomas was thought to have provided to advance a broader understanding and application of these images. In the third book of *De vita coelitus comparanda* ("On Obtaining Life from the Heavens"), the Neoplatonic philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) used Thomas's alleged concession in one of his several defences of "astrological images."<sup>46</sup> An even more effective use

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<sup>44</sup> Copenhaver, "Scholastic Philosophy," esp. 533–34; Weill-Parot, *Les "Images astrologiques,"* 248–59, 656.

<sup>45</sup> On the role of specific/substantial form and occult properties related to astral magic, see Copenhaver, "Scholastic Philosophy"; and Weill-Parot, "Astrology, Astral Influences" and *Points aveugles de la nature*.

<sup>46</sup> Copenhaver, "Scholastic Philosophy"; Weill-Parot, "Pénombre ficinienne."

of this passage was achieved in the *De doctrina promiscua*, written in 1489/90 by Galeotto Marzio da Narni (1427–1490), a proponent of a daring philosophy based on a fusion of Aristotelianism, materialism, and astrology. This book offers one of the most accomplished naturalistic explanations of “astrological images” according to a peripatetic framework. Taking Thomas Aquinas’s pseudo-concession in *Summa contra gentiles* as his starting point, Marzio argues that the figure of Leo, imprinted under the appropriate constellation, does not really act as such but, instead, operates through the peculiar arrangement of matter resulting from its carving—that is, the quantity of matter removed through carving (hollowed places) or left intact (embossed places). Thus, the figure of a lion is different from that of a dog, since a lion has a mane and a very long tail. In the carved image, “the neck of a dog, since it has no mane, will display a greater density of gold than the neck of a lion. And since the form of the mane will create a deeper hollow, the gold will necessarily be less thick in this place.”<sup>47</sup> In this way, Marzio succeeds in removing any “addressative” aspect from the image, because the image does not act *qua* image (which would imply an addressative process). He reduces the carved figure to an arrangement of quantities: density of matter and spatial distribution of volume.<sup>48</sup> We might say that it becomes similar to a three-dimensional barcode, which is automatically detected by a barcode reader. There is no need for an external (supernatural) agent, a separate intelligence able to perceive the image and understand its meaning. The whole operation can be explained by the blind action of nature, as a natural process. Thus, a natural causality accounts for the differences between a piece of gold carved with the figure of a lion and a piece of gold deprived of such a figure, without implying that the artificial figure is a substantial form and without supposing any addressative call to a demonic intelligence able to perceive such a difference.<sup>49</sup>

As we have seen, these naturalistic arguments for the astrological seal unfolded within a broader framework in which the “astrological image” could be either a figurine or a seal. But the most accurate accounts focus on source-figured seals (e.g., the seal of Leo against kidney aches), even though Thebit’s *De imaginibus*, which epitomizes the concept of “astrological image,” according to the author of

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**47** Galeotto Marzio da Narni (Galeottus Martius Narniensis), *De doctrina promiscua* (Lugduni: apud Ioan. Tornaesium, 1552), cap. 24, 250–58, esp. 255–56: “Collum enim canis, cum sine iuba sit, densius aurum haberet quam leonis. Iuba nanque formata, cum in illa impressura profundius insederit, necesse est aurum eo in loco rarius esse.”

**48** Ibid., 256: “Unde concludimus quod haec aptitudo ad vim caelestem hauriendam in figura est, non ut figura, sed ut densius rariusve aurum imaginis conditione formatur.”

**49** Weill-Parot, “L’irréductible ‘destinativité.’” On the general frame of Marzio’s philosophy, see D’Alessandro, “Astrologia.”



the *Speculum astronomiae*, deals with target-figured figurines. There are several reasons for this focus on source-figured seals. First, the textual tradition highlights discussions of “licit” talismans used in medicine, which were seals and not figurines. Medicine was one of the few academic fields in which natural magic could be admitted. Second, and more fundamentally, as is obvious in Albert the Great’s *De mineralibus*, the likeness between the star or constellation and the engraved image was key for the whole explanation. This likeness was not thought of as self-efficient within the medieval peripatetic system, as it could be in a Neoplatonic framework based on links of sympathy between similar beings.<sup>50</sup> Instead, it was the visible side of a deeper likeness between the form of the star or constellation and the new specific form of the artificial object. Thus, this likeness was the most obvious part of the process through which the talisman was empowered. Third, the process of “imprinting” was the understructure of the explanatory framework. By carving or imprinting a talismanic figure, the craftsman or sealer prepared matter to receive, at the right astrological moment, a new accidental form imprinted by the ruling zodiacal sign. The seal as matrix or as imprint exemplified this general process of imprinting by the astral influence.<sup>51</sup>

Because these second and third reasons—the power of representation and the imprinting process—defined the seal itself, astrological seals provide a good case study for grasping the many potentialities associated with seals in general. Even the most sceptical theologian who denied any natural power to astrological seals was aware of the great powers inherent in the idea of the seal in a very wide range of risky fields, from the doctrine of the Eucharist to the theory of magical talismans. The conceptual power of the seal was, after all, no less formidable than the alleged magical power of a talisman.

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50 Weill-Parot, “Les images corporéiformes.”

51 The new Neoplatonic framework adopted by Italian humanists in the fifteenth century may have allowed explanatory schemes in which the talisman could be a drawn or painted image and not a carved image (such as a seal): see Morel, *Mélissa*. Recently, however, this hypothesis has been called into question by Ana Debenedetti, “Dans l’antre.”

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**Abstract:** The article studies the issue of “astrological seals”—imprinted talismans deriving their powers from the stars—within the general framework of medieval theological and philosophical thought about seals. First, it looks at how astrological *sigilla* are described in treatises on magic, notably that of Theel, the Pseudo-Ptolemy’s *Centiloquium*, the *Liber formarum* (ascribed to Hermes), and the work of the Spanish physician Estéfano. Second, it focuses on two comparisons put forward and rejected by theologians: William of Auvergne’s analysis of the analogy between the astrological talisman and the royal seal, and an anonymous academic *quaestio* from the fifteenth century, dealing with the parallel between the sealing process and celestial influence. Third, it considers the way that Albert the Great took advantage of the distinctive features of seals, in order to explain the astrological seal within a purely naturalistic framework, and the opposing views of Thomas Aquinas. It concludes in the fifteenth century, when Galeotto Marzio brought a naturalistic explanation for the working of astrological seals to completion.

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**Keywords** astrology, “astrological images,” seals, William of Auvergne, Albertus Magnus, Galeotto Marzio da Narni

# A MEDIEVAL SOLUTION TO AN EARLY MODERN PROBLEM? THE ROYAL ANIMAL SEALS OF JAMBI

ANNABEL TEH GALLOP

## Seals in Early Maritime Southeast Asia

*They write with Sanscrit-characters and the king uses his ring as a seal.*

From the description of San Fo-qi (Srivijaya) in the *Song-shi*,  
the official history of the Song dynasty (960–1279)<sup>1</sup>

Srivijaya was a city state on the eastern seaboard of Sumatra, initially centred at Palembang and latterly at Jambi, which exercised enormous political and economic influence over large swathes of maritime Southeast Asia from the seventh to the fourteenth centuries (see Map 4.1). While the waxing power of Srivijaya coincided with the medieval era in Europe, its waning moved the Malay world towards early modern times, characterized by the Islamization of formerly Hindu/Buddhist royal courts throughout the archipelago from the late thirteenth century onwards, by heightened contact with China through the Ming voyages of exploration in the fifteenth century, and by the arrival of Europeans in Southeast Asia in the early sixteenth century.

Despite its apparently impressive spatial and temporal reach, Srivijaya remains a shadowy entity, its very existence proposed only in the early twentieth century based upon Chinese accounts of a kingdom called “San Fo-qi” and the deciphering of stone inscriptions in Old Malay.<sup>2</sup> It has left few physical remains, and our knowledge of its sigillography is likewise limited to the oft-quoted statement above. Indeed, a survey of the early use of seals throughout maritime Southeast Asia during this medieval period yields but a fragmentary picture, comprising a few imported seal stones engraved with Indic or Arabic script and slightly larger numbers of locally manufactured gold seal rings. It is only in Java that a large enough body of evidence exists (in the form of intaglios, gold signet rings, terracotta and clay sealings, and inscriptional references to seals) to posit a continuous tradition of sealing from the ninth century onwards, even though we still have little understanding of how this may have worked.<sup>3</sup>

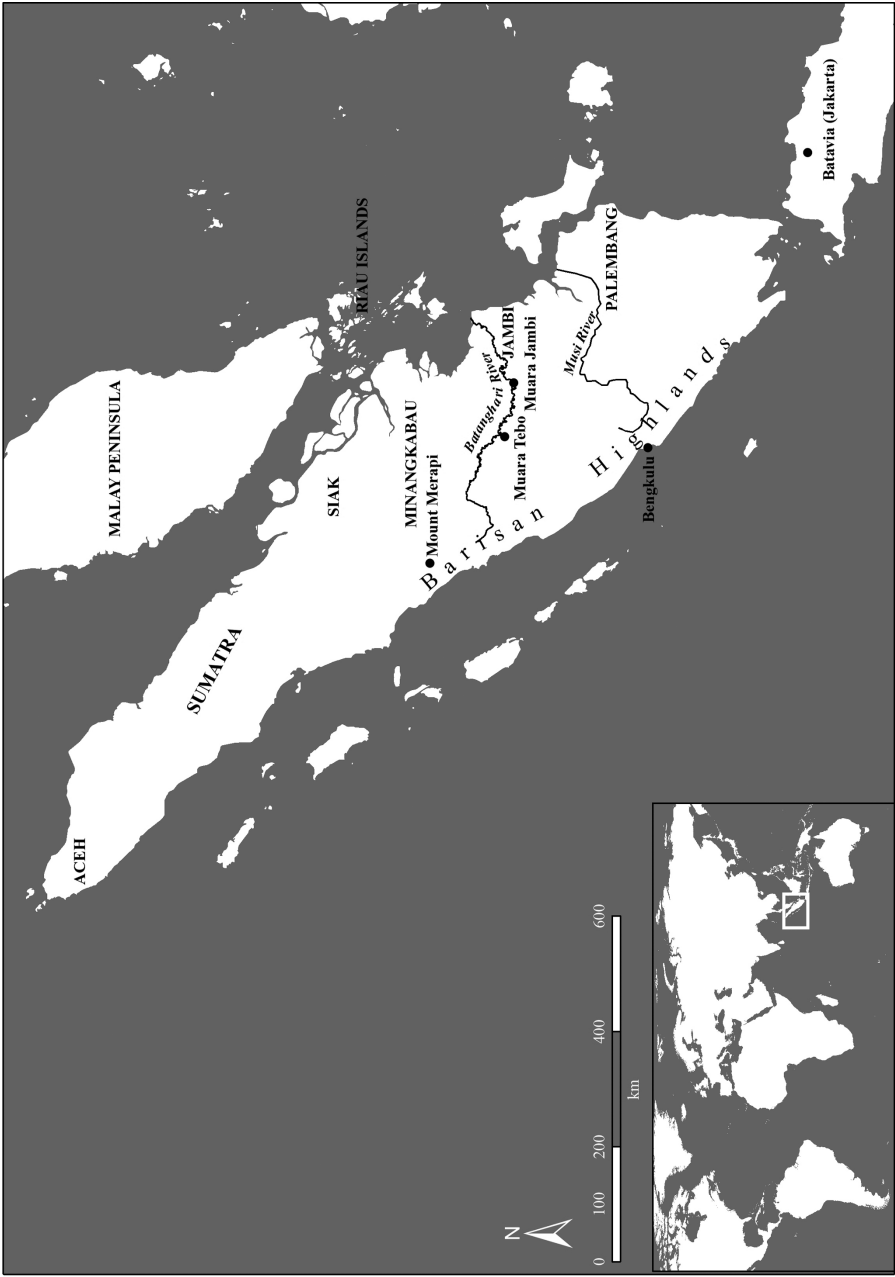
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1 Groeneveldt, *Notes*, 63.

2 First proposed by George Coedes in 1918; see Coedes and Damais, *Srivijaya*, 4.

3 Gallop, “The Early Use.”





Map 4.1. The Sultanate of Jambi and its neighbours.

From the mid-sixteenth century onwards, however, the evolution of a coherent sealing culture throughout the Islamic courts of the Malay Archipelago can be discerned. The number of Malay seals—understood as seals with inscriptions in Arabic script from Southeast Asia—swells in the course of the seventeenth century, and by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries constitutes a considerable and developed corpus of over 2,000 seals, documented primarily from impressions on manuscript documents, but including some 300 seal matrices.<sup>4</sup> Malay seals can thus be regarded as a subset of the much larger body of Islamic seals worldwide, characterized primarily through the defining presence of Arabic script, which unites seals from all Muslim cultural regions, from Morocco in the west to Mindanao in the east. Many aspects of the inscriptions of Malay seals consciously conform to an idealized Islamic prototype, as, for example, in the use of a standard Islamic-Arabic name such as *Muhammad* or *Abdullah* for the seal holder, rather than an indigenous name or descriptive epithet in Malay or another local language by which he is more likely to have been known. Pious expressions in Arabic are familiar from other Islamic seals, primarily variations on a theme of *al-wāthiq billāh*, “he who trusts in God,” and a Hijra-era dating formula.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, the “Malay” identity of these Islamic seals is never in doubt, whether in form or content. Inscriptions on Malay seals frequently include a toponym, which is rarely found on other Islamic seals; moreover, official titles of nobles and senior ministers are almost invariably expressed in words of Indic, rather than Arabic, origin. Iconographically, Malay seals are larger than most other Islamic seals, and the matrices are made of metal and designed to be stamped in lampblack from the soot of a flame, in contrast to the small engraved hardstone seals stamped in ink common in the Middle East and through Iran into the Indian subcontinent. The most popular shapes for Malay seals are circles (Figure 4.4) and petalled circles, which undeniably recall the auspicious lotus blossom that features prominently in pre-Islamic Hindu-Buddhist artworks of the region. Another defining iconographic feature is a spatial layout that emphasizes a sacred centre at the midst of the four cardinal points and four further mid-points. These complementary preoccupations manifest themselves in a marked preponderance of Malay seals in the shape of an eight-petalled flower (as can be seen in the seals illustrated in Figures 4.1 to 4.3 and 4.6 to 4.7), while floral seals with four, twelve, and sixteen petals are also common.

There is also remarkable consistency in the content of Malay seals across the whole of maritime Southeast Asia, a geographical area stretching some 3,000 miles

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<sup>4</sup> See Gallop, *Malay Seals* and “Malay Seal Inscriptions.”

<sup>5</sup> See Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals*, 50–55, for similar phrases.

from west to east, encompassing thousands of islands and hundreds of languages. In the Malay world, the use of a seal was generally restricted to officials of the royal court. The inscription would identify the individual owner of the seal by his (or, rarely, her) name and/or title, sometimes supplemented by a pedigree, toponym, and date, often accompanied by a religious expression and occasionally a talismanic formula. At the same time, there are discernible regional characteristics, especially in the seals of sovereigns, that can enable the origin of a seal to be identified at a single glance. Sometimes this distinction might hinge on a single preferred word or phrase; for example, the divine epithet *rabb al-'arsh*, "lord of the throne," is strongly associated with royal seals from Riau, while the pious descriptor *al-manṣūr billāh*, "he who is protected by God," is found only on seals of the sultans of Siak. In other cases the defining regional feature might be primarily graphic, and, since its founding in 1772, all sovereign seals from Pontianak, on the west coast of Borneo, are identifiable by their diamond shape and a protective talismanic formula written in disconnected letters around the border. Perhaps most famous of all, for both content and form, is the great seal of Aceh. In the middle of the seventeenth century Aceh adopted and adapted the design of the genealogical seal of the Mughal emperors of India, and for the next 250 years all sultans of Aceh used a large "ninefold" seal with the name of the ruler in a circle in the middle, surrounded by eight smaller circles containing the names of royal forebears.

This article will explore one of the most distinctive such dynastic seals used in the Malay world of Southeast Asia: the animal seal of the sultans of Jambi in east Sumatra. The design of an eight-petalled round seal with animals in four of the petals, which was introduced in the middle of the eighteenth century and adopted by all successive sovereigns of Jambi for the following century and a half, was an exceptionally unusual choice for an Islamic sultanate, as the depiction of living creatures in official contexts is usually strictly avoided in Muslim societies. As will be suggested below, this seal was probably created at a politically critical juncture in Jambi history, as a bold graphic endeavour to unite, symbolically, the two contesting factions at the Jambi court: the Javanese elite, represented on this new seal by the sultan's Javanese title placed in the other four petals; and the Minangkabau power behind the throne, evoked by images of four legendary animals from the Minangkabau myth of origin.

### **Chancery Practice in the Muslim Sultanate of Jambi**

The Malay sultanate of Jambi was located on the Batanghari, the longest river in Sumatra, which flows from the Bukit Barisan highlands in the west down to the Straits of Melaka in the east. Jambi was the site of Malayu, one of the oldest polities

in Southeast Asia, which was mentioned in Chinese records from the seventh century and which, by the eleventh century, had emerged as the capital of Srivijaya. The ruins of Muara Jambi, the largest Hindu-Buddhist temple complex in Southeast Asia, testify to the importance of the realm.<sup>6</sup> In 1275 Malayu-Jambi was conquered by the east Javanese kingdom of Singhasari; but, with the fall of Singhasari, towards the end of the thirteenth century, Jambi came under the sway of the emerging Javanese empire of Majapahit. In the middle of the fourteenth century a prince of Malayu, Adityawarman, returned to Sumatra from Java and sailed up the Batanghari to establish his own kingdom at Dharmasraya, before moving into the Minangkabau highlands, leaving a trail of monumental stone statues and inscriptions in his wake.<sup>7</sup> With the fall of Majapahit, in the sixteenth century, Jambi regained its independence but retained a deeply embedded cultural legacy of Javanese influence. Javanese remained the court language of Jambi into the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup>

The kingdom of Jambi probably converted to Islam during the sixteenth century, and in legendary sources the royal family traces its ancestry from the union of a Turkish nobleman and a princess from Minangkabau.<sup>9</sup> The heyday of Jambi was in the seventeenth century, when it became one of the richest pepper-exporting ports in Sumatra, and its ruler took the title of “sultan.” By the end of the century, however, Jambi’s glory days were over and it had cleaved into two polities, with the downstream (*hilir*) sultan at the court at Tanah Pilih (site of the present city of Jambi), supported by the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, henceforth VOC), and another ruler upstream (*hulu*), under the patronage of the Minangkabau ruler at Pagaruyung. The kingdom was reunited in the early eighteenth century, but trade declined with the departure of the VOC, and for the rest of the century Jambi was little more than a vassal of Minangkabau. In the nineteenth century resistance to aggressive Dutch expansion meant that once more Jambi was de facto divided into two kingdoms, *hilir* and *hulu*, with Sultan Taha Saifuddin based in the highlands, while puppet or “shadow” rulers (*sultan bayang*) were installed by the Dutch at the downriver court. The capture and killing of Sultan Taha by the Dutch in 1904 brought to an end the sultanate of Jambi.<sup>10</sup>

6 Tjoa-Bonatz, Neidel, and Widiatmoko, “Early Architectural Images,” 33.

7 On the early history of Jambi, see Kulke, “Adityawarman’s Highland Kingdom,” 229–33.

8 Andaya, *To Live as Brothers*, 66–67, 72.

9 Braginsky, *The Turkic-Turkish Theme*, 131–54.

10 For the history of Jambi in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Andaya, *To Live as Brothers*; and Braginsky, *The Turkic-Turkish Theme*; and, for the nineteenth century, see Locher-Scholten, *Sumatran Sultanate*.

About seventy Malay seals have been documented from Jambi, with inscriptions in Arabic script, dating from the middle of the seventeenth century to the early twentieth. Most of the sovereign seals from Jambi have been found on letters and treaties with the Dutch now held in the National Archives in Jakarta but, uniquely for a Malay polity, many seals have also been recorded from original manuscript documents still held in remote villages. From at least the seventeenth century onwards the sultans and nobles of Jambi would ratify their relationships of fealty with local chiefs in the hinterland of Jambi, in the upper tributaries of the river Batanghari reaching as far as Kerinci, through the bestowal of royal edicts. Local chiefs (*dipati*) would be granted sealed edicts written in Malay, confirming their titles and privileges and sometimes specifying the boundaries of land under their jurisdiction, while also outlining their responsibilities, including the upholding of Islamic law and enforcing the royal prerogative to certain forest produce. Occasionally, following the installation of a new chief, or on a visit to the interior by a succeeding sultan, older edicts were reconfirmed with the seal of the new ruler or reinforced with further annotations. Some of these documents have survived for centuries, treated as sacred *pusaka* or village heirlooms, stored carefully in the rafters of the house of the village chief, and brought out and aired just once a year in the context of a village ceremony and feast. The manuscript heirlooms of Kerinci were first surveyed and documented by P. Voorhoeve in 1940.<sup>11</sup> Similar collections have more recently been recorded in the Serampas region of Merangin,<sup>12</sup> in Sungai Tenang,<sup>13</sup> and in Sarolangun,<sup>14</sup> suggesting that more documents may still be held in other locations in highland Jambi.

The first reference to the use of seals in Jambi is found in a treaty between the VOC and the “pangoran Dupatij Anum” of Jambi dated July 6, 1643, and stamped with “His Highness’s seal.”<sup>15</sup> Pangiran Dipati Anum ruled Jambi from 1630 until his death in 1679 (see Table 4.1). From 1661 he was known as Pangiran Ratu, after installing his son as junior ruler, and then in 1669—at the zenith of Jambi’s

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**11** Voorhoeve, “Tambo Kerintji,” 1970. When some of the same villages in Kerinci were revisited by Uli Kozok in 2007, for a project to digitize *pusaka* collections, certain of the documents seen by Voorhoeve in 1940 were found to be still extant; see the British Library’s Endangered Archives Programme, EAP117; and Kozok, *A 14th Century Malay Code*.

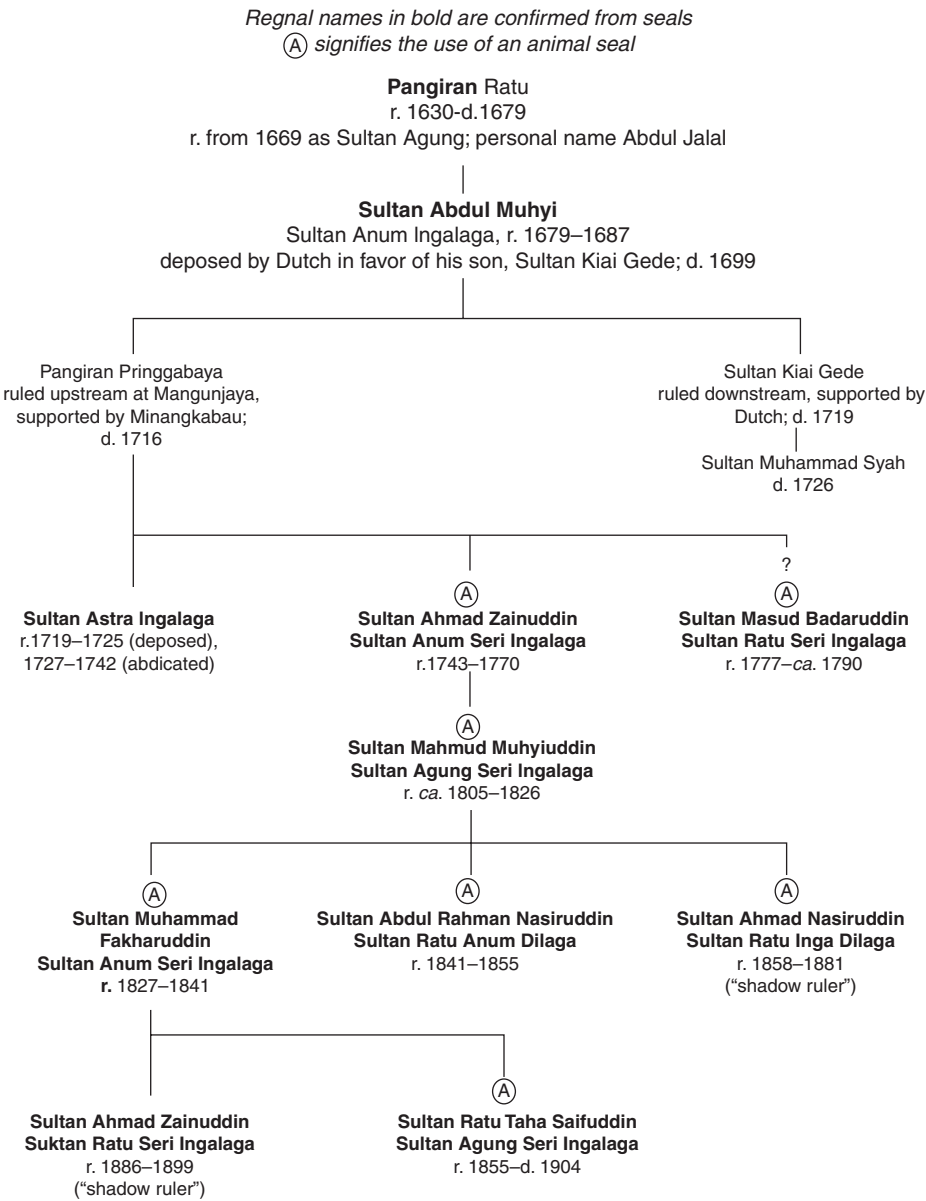
**12** Fieldwork in the villages of Renah Kemumu and Renah Alai was undertaken by David Neidel in 2003 and 2004; see Gallop, “*Piagam Serampas*.”

**13** Fieldwork in the village of Muara Mendras was undertaken by Heinz-Peter Znoj in 1989; see Gallop, “*Piagam Muara Mendras*.”

**14** Recorded in the village of Lubuk Resam (personal communication on Facebook from Sriwahyuni, November 2015).

**15** Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum*, 412.

Table 4.1. Rulers of Jambi, seventeenth to nineteenth centuries



power—he became known as Sultan Agung, taking the title also borne by two of his most powerful contemporaries, the sultans of Mataram and Banten in Java. The only seal of this ruler that has been recorded, however, found on a letter of 1669, simply bears his title of “*Pangiran Jambi*” (#640).<sup>16</sup> A round seal with a broad border of six-petalled flowers in a meandering vine pattern, it is one of the most beautiful early Malay seals known. The seal of his son and successor, Sultan Abdul Muhyi Anum Ingalaga (r. 1679–1687), also has an original and attractive design of an eight-petalled circle with the inscription “*al-Sultan Abdul Muhyi ibn Abdul Jalal*” written around a four-petalled flower in the centre (#899).<sup>17</sup> The next surviving royal seal is the eight-petalled circle seal of Abdul Muhyi’s grandson, Sultan Astra Ingalaga (r. 1719–1725, 1727–1742), found on a treaty with the Dutch of 1721 (#896).

### Royal Animal Seals of Jambi

Until the reign of Sultan Astra Ingalaga, in the early eighteenth century, all known royal seals of Jambi can be characterized as typically Malay in form, with shapes of circles or petalled circles, embellished with delicate floral and foliate scroll patterns. But, from the second half of the eighteenth century until the late nineteenth century, the sovereign seals of eight rulers of Jambi conformed to a very unusual design. All still take the traditional form of an eight-petalled circle, with the Muslim regnal name of the sovereign inscribed in the centre; but, while four alternate petals enclose the ruler’s unique Javanese regnal title, the other four petals each contain an image of an animal.

The first ruler known to use such a seal was Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin Anum Seri Ingalaga (r. 1743–1770) (#900) (Figure 4.1), who was the younger brother of Sultan Astra Ingalaga. On his seal and that of his successor, Sultan Masud Badruddin Ratu Seri Ingalaga (r. ca. 1777–1790) (#644) (Figure 4.2), the animals are quite clearly formed and distinct from one another. Although difficult to identify precisely, each seal displays an elephant and three other animals that may resemble a tiger, cat, dog, or buffalo. In the seals of all subsequent rulers, however, from Sultan Mahmud Muhyiuddin Agung Seri Ingalaga (r. 1805–1826) (#639) up to Sultan Taha Saifuddin Agung Seri Ingalaga (r. 1855–1904) (#1802) and his downstream Dutch-installed “shadow” ruler (*bayang*), Sultan Ahmad Nasiruddin Ratu Inga Dilaga (r. 1858–1881) (#906), the four animals appear in a stylized form

<sup>16</sup> Here, and elsewhere, the # number refers to the unique seal record number in Gallop, “Malay Seal Inscriptions,” and in the forthcoming enlarged catalogue. Seal #640 is also reproduced in Gallop, “*Piagam Serampas*,” 319.

<sup>17</sup> Reproduced in Gallop, “*Piagam Serampas*,” 319.

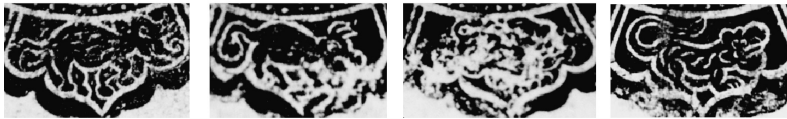


Figure 4.1. Seal of Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin of Jambi (r. 1742–ca. 1770), with details of the four animals engraved in the petals, resembling (left to right) an elephant, a dog, [unclear], a tiger. The seal is inscribed in the centre *al-wāthiq billāh al-Jalī Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin*, “He who trusts in God, the Resplendent One, Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin.” In four of the petals is his Javanese regnal name: *Sultan / Anum / Seri / Ingalaga*. This seal is impressed on a contract with the VOC (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*), October 16, 1763, ANRI Riouw 68/7. Reproduced courtesy of the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia, Jakarta.

with little distinction among them, all appearing as a kind of hybrid four-legged creature with a tail and a trunk (Figure 4.3).

The portrayal of animals on the seal of state of a Muslim sovereign is an extraordinary development, flouting the widespread Islamic convention of avoiding the depiction of living creatures in official and religious contexts. Of the over 2,000 Malay seals documented from the Islamic world of Southeast Asia over a period of four centuries, these eight Jambi seals are the only ones to feature animals, apart from the heraldic beasts found in coats of arms on Dutch colonial-era seals. A similar absence of animal images is evident in all other catalogues of Islamic seals, save for very early examples reflecting continuing influences from the Sasanian



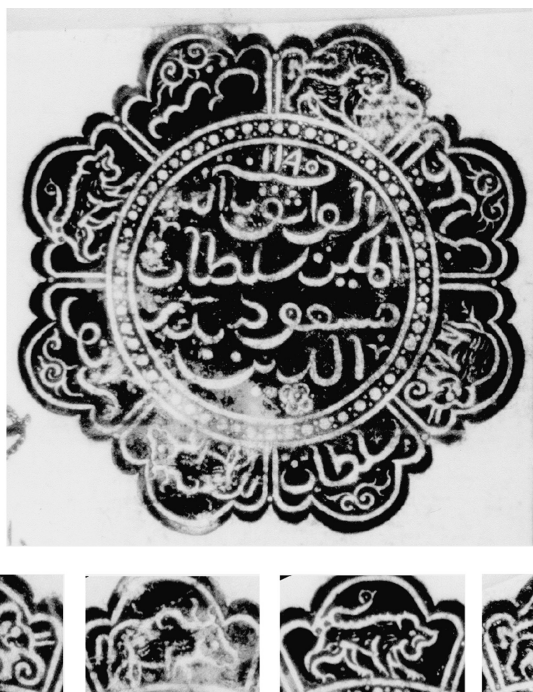


Figure 4.2. Seal of Sultan Masud Badaruddin of Jambi (r. ca. 1770–ca. 1790), with details of the four animals engraved in the petals, resembling (left to right) an elephant, a buffalo, a dog, a tiger. The seal is inscribed in the centre *sanat 1190 al-wāthiq billāh al-Makīn Sultan Masud Badaruddin*, “The year 1190 (AD 1776/7), he who trusts in God, the Master, Sultan Masud Badaruddin.” In four of the petals is his Javanese regnal name: *Sultan / Ratu / Seri / Ingalaga*. This seal is impressed on a letter from Paduka Sultan Ratu Seri Ingalaga of Jambi to Francis Light in Penang, Zulkaidah 9, 1203 (August 1, 1789), SOAS MS 40320/11, f. 111. Reproduced courtesy of the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

tradition,<sup>18</sup> or very late seals.<sup>19</sup> Within the royal Jambi chancery there must have been a profound attachment to this seal, and all it signified, for the design to have survived for over 150 years. Although in the course of this period the depiction of the animals has clearly undergone a process of stylization, four quadrupeds remain indubitably present on the seal. The seal is even found stamped, seemingly unself-consciously, on Sultan Taha Saifuddin’s letter of 1858 written in Arabic to the Ottoman sultan Abdülmecid. The Ottoman ruler is addressed as “the glory of

<sup>18</sup> See Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals*, 84–85.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 112–15.

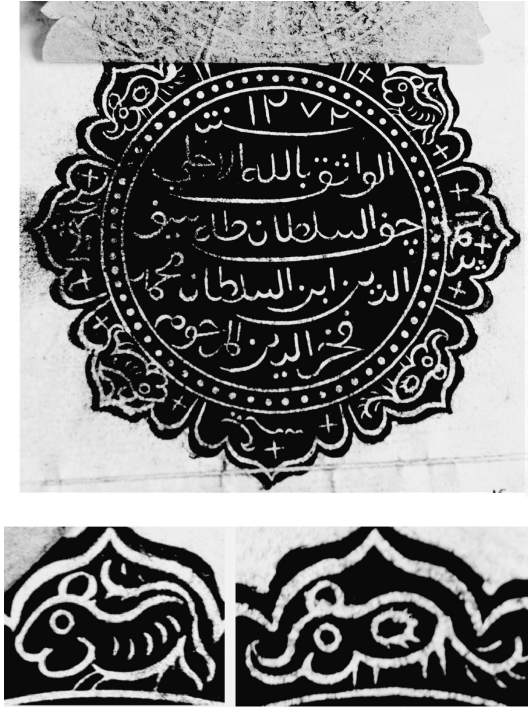


Figure 4.3. Seal of Sultan Taha Saifuddin (r. 1855–1904), with details of the two pairs of stylized animals engraved in the petals, resembling (left) a tiger with stripes, and (right) an elephant with trunk and tail. The seal is inscribed in the centre *sanat 1272 al-wāthiq billāh al-Jalī cap al-Sultan Taha Saifuddin ibn al-Sultan Muhammad Fakhruddin al-marhum*, “The year 1272 (AD 1855/6), he who trusts in God, the Resplendent One, the seal of the Sultan Taha Saifuddin, son of the late Sultan Muhammad Fakhruddin.” In four of the petals is his Javanese regnal name: *Sultan / Agung / Seri / Ingalaga*. This seal is impressed on a letter in Arabic to the Ottoman Sultan Abdülmecid, Zulkaidah 19, 1274 (July 1, 1858), BOA I.HR 173/9431. Reproduced courtesy of the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri (Prime Ministry of Ottoman Archives), Istanbul.

Islamic kings and God’s Caliph over the rest of humanity,”<sup>20</sup> and Sultan Taha requests that Jambi be recognized as Ottoman territory, in an attempt to gain protection against Dutch aggression. Yet at the head of this letter—couched as an appeal from a Muslim vassal to his spiritual and temporal overlord—is impressed a seal that could be regarded as blatantly contravening the general tenets of the faith.

Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century the steady rise of Islamic reformism was probably responsible for the demise of the animal seal. The round

20 Kadi, “The Ottomans,” 161.

seal of the last “shadow” ruler of Jambi, Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin Ratu Seri Ingalaga (r. 1885–1899) (#679), still places the sultan’s Javanese regnal name in four separate cartouches in the border—recalling the four petals of yesteryear—and yet there are no animals depicted on this seal (Figure 4.4). A late seal of Sultan Taha, dated 1305 (AD 1887/8), could perhaps be interpreted as an attempt to channel aspects of the old sovereign seal into a form more acceptable to Islamic (specifically Ottoman) sensibilities: it contains the only known example of zoomorphic calligraphy on a Malay seal, arranged in the shape of a bird (#681).<sup>21</sup>

The significance of these unprecedented animals is not easily deciphered, nor are there any obvious sources or parallels that come to mind from other artworks in Jambi, such as woodcarving or metalwork. As noted earlier, however, the petalled-circle shape of the seals themselves is undoubtedly ultimately derived from the lotus blossom. The lotus flower is a symbol of purity in Buddhism and Hinduism, and deities are often portrayed or sculpted seated on a round *padmapitha* or “lotus-throne,” adorned with a single or double row of lotus petals. A lotus pedestal would thus serve as a base for “anything divine, holy or auspicious, be it a deity or a symbolic object,” and it is therefore hardly surprising that petalled circles resembling lotus blossoms were such a popular choice for a royal Malay seal with the name of the sovereign inscribed in the centre.<sup>22</sup> There are many such manifestations of the lotus excavated at Muara Jambi, probably dating from the ninth to early fourteenth centuries, including *padmapitha* in stone and brick. Of particular interest are numerous bricks from Muara Jambi engraved with eight-petalled lotus flowers, which in the shape and orientation of the petals are almost exactly identical to the two earliest royal animal seals of Jambi (Figure 4.5).

In view of the close iconographic similarity between the outline of the earliest royal animal seals and the particular form of the lotus blossom on bricks from Muara Jambi, one question that arises is whether the design of the Jambi seal could perhaps be related to a mandala or another tantric diagram at one time current in Jambi. In the ninth century Srivijaya was closely connected with esoteric Buddhist scholarly networks that, centred on the great university of Nalanda in Bihar, stretched from India to Sumatra and Java, and northwards through Central Asia to China and Japan.<sup>23</sup> A sketch of a *Vajradhātu* mandala (dating from the late

<sup>21</sup> Around this time Jambi also became famous for its calligraphy batik, decorated with stylized Ottoman-style tughras, birds, and other zoomorphic devices: see Kerlogue, “Islamic Talismans.”

<sup>22</sup> Van Lohuizen-de Leeuw, *Indo-Javanese Metalwork*, 27; Gallop and Porter, *Lasting Impressions*, 166–68.

<sup>23</sup> Aciri, “Esoteric Buddhist Networks.”



Figure 4.4. Seal of Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin (r. 1886–1899); although there are no animals, the placement of his Javanese regnal name *al-Sultan / Ratu / Seri / Ingalaga* in four cartouches in the border recalls the petals of the “animal seals.” The seal is inscribed in the centre *sanat 1304 al-wāthiq billāh al-Jalī Maulana al-Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin ibn al-Sultan Muhammad Fakharuddin al-marhum*, “The year 1304 (AD 1886/7), he who trusts in God, the Resplendent One, our lord the Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin, son of the late Sultan Muhammad Fakharuddin.” Museum Bronbeek 2011/02/02-1-1. Reproduced courtesy of the Museum Bronbeek, Arnhem.

ninth century and found at Dunhuang) shows, at the cardinal points, the four *vajra* guardians each accompanied by an animal: an elephant, snow lion, tiger, and dog.<sup>24</sup> Notwithstanding the apparent similarity between these four animals and those found on the much later royal animal seals from Jambi, there is little evidence of Indian Pala influence on Sumatran art of that period,<sup>25</sup> and the absence of attested examples of a *Vajradhātu* mandala in a Sumatran context is also problematic.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Sketch of a Tang dynasty *Vajradhātu* mandala with the five Dhyāni Buddhas, British Museum 1919.0101.0.173; reproduced in Zwalf, *Buddhism*, 222.

<sup>25</sup> Lunsingh Scheuleer and Klokke, *Divine Bronze*, 37.

<sup>26</sup> Excavations at Candi Gumpung at Muara Jambi revealed inscribed gold plates with the names of twenty-two tantric deities, which have been interpreted by Boechari (“Ritual



Figure 4.5. Brick engraved with an eight-petalled lotus design, ca. ninth to fourteenth centuries. Muara Jambi site museum. Photo: A. T. Gallop, 2013.

Hence, while lotus imagery has continuously featured in artworks from Sumatra for over 1,000 years, it is difficult to posit a direct link between a Buddhist mandala that may or may not have been known at Jambi during the Srivijaya period and a chancery innovation at the Muslim court in the eighteenth century. It seems more pertinent to investigate reasons for introducing the new seal design at this particular juncture in Jambi's history.

### **A Towering Presence: Minangkabau Patronage in Jambi**

The last purely "floral" royal Jambi seal to be documented was that of Sultan Astra Ingalaga, found on a treaty with the Dutch of 1721, while the first "animal" seal was that of his younger brother, Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin, who came to the throne in 1743. What was the catalyst for the momentous change in the sigillographic landscape of Jambi during the second quarter of the eighteenth century? A clue might lie in the political upheavals of this period, during which the major power behind the throne of Jambi was Minangkabau.

Sultan Astra Ingalaga was the son of Pangiran Pringgabaya, who in 1690 had founded a new royal court called Mangunjaya, upstream at Muara Tebo, choosing to place himself under Minangkabau patronage rather than live downstream in Jambi at Tanah Pilih, under the rule of his Dutch-installed brother, Sultan Kiai Gede

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Deposits," 238) as belonging to the *Vajradhātu* mandala, but by Max Nihom ("Mandala," 246) as deriving from the *Vajrasekharatantra*.

(r. 1687–1719). Installed by the Minangkabau ruler, Pringgabaya was given the title of Sultan Maharaja Batu Abdul Rahman,<sup>27</sup> and for the next two decades his *hulu* realm flourished at the expense of the *hilir* court of Kiai Gede. After a reconciliation between the two brothers in 1708, Pringgabaya was subsequently exiled by the Dutch to Batavia, where he died in 1716. With Kiai Gede's death in 1719, and under great pressure from upstream communities, the Dutch agreed to bring Pringgabaya's son, Raden Astrawijaya, from Batavia to Jambi, where he was installed as Sultan Astra Ingalaga. There was continuing opposition from the "downstream" court faction of Kiai Gede's family, however, and in 1725 Astra Ingalaga was deposed and imprisoned, while Kiai Gede's son was installed as Sultan Muhammad Syah. After Muhammad's sudden death, in December 1726, the Minangkabau court at Pagaruyung intervened to propose a settlement. In March 1727 the Minangkabau ruler himself, the Yang Dipertuan, travelled downriver and appeared in Tanah Pilih, after which Astra Ingalaga was freed after two traumatic years of captivity and reinstated on the throne of Jambi. Despite this dramatic show of support, Astra Ingalaga's reign continued to be marked by declining trade and tensions between both *hulu* and *hilir* and Minangkabau newcomers and local highland chiefs, exacerbated by conflicts between the royal princes themselves. Finally, in 1742, Astra Ingalaga was persuaded to step down in favour of his youngest brother, Pangiran Sutawijaya, who was installed as Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin Anum Seri Ingalaga.<sup>28</sup>

The role of the Yang Dipertuan of Pagaruyung as "kingmaker" in Jambi reflected the special awe and respect that the rulers of Minangkabau commanded throughout Sumatra. Inheriting the mantle of Adityawarman's fourteenth-century highland kingdom and his imperial title of "Supreme King of the Great Kings" (*maharajadhiraja*),<sup>29</sup> the kings of Minangkabau claimed descent from Iskandar Zulkarnain, the name by which Alexander the Great is known in the Islamic world. In Malay chronicles, the first ruler of Minangkabau is honoured as one of three princes to appear at Bukit Seguntang, the sacred hill near Palembang. Numerous royal houses of Sumatra attribute their origins to Minangkabau, including Jambi and Inderagiri on the east coast of the island and Barus, Muko-Muko, and Inderapura on the west coast.<sup>30</sup> Yet the realm of Minangkabau was more easily described in terms of its aura and charisma than its physical infrastructure or other tangible

27 'Soeltan Aboe'l-Rachman' (Wellan, "De loge," 449n).

28 This overview of a complex period of Jambi history is summarized from Andaya, *To Live as Brothers*, 133–68.

29 Kulke, "Adityawarman's Highland Kingdom," 234.

30 Drakard, *A Kingdom of Words*, 4–5.



signs of executive power, and Jane Drakard has famously characterized the polity as a “kingdom of words,” whose power and authority was “realized and actuated through language and the dissemination of royal signs.”<sup>31</sup>

Displays of Minangkabau ascendancy in the *rantau*—areas of traditional Minangkabau migration and settlement outside the heartland—appear to have been especially evident in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>32</sup> In addition to embassies by Minangkabau princes and envoys and substantive migration by Minangkabau settlers and traders, one manifestation of royal authority was through the issuing of Minangkabau royal letters and seals of patronage. Many of these are known only from reports in Dutch accounts, such as a letter sent to the Dutch in Jambi announcing Minangkabau support for Pringgabaya’s upriver realm: “Duli Yang Dipertuan had made his grandson, Sultan Sri Maharaja Batu Johan Pahlawan Alam Syah, king of Mangunjaya, and had given him the lands from the foot of Gunung Merapi to Mangunjaya.”<sup>33</sup> Approached through the prism of Dutch translations preserved in the VOC archives, it is often difficult to appreciate the original wording and nuance as well as physical manifestation of these royal grants. Therefore, extant royal Minangkabau seals of patronage, a number of which have been documented, are of very great interest.<sup>34</sup> Compared to other Malay seals, which typically serve only to identify the seal holder by name, title, and other attributes, the inscriptions on Minangkabau seals of patronage constitute nothing less than a full grant of authority. One such seal (Figure 4.6) was issued to a ruler of Jambi, bearing the lengthy inscription:

*Sultan Abdul Jalil yang mempunyai tahta kerajaan negeri Minangkabau mengaku anak kepada Sultan Abdul Muhyiuddin yang mempunyai tahta kerajaan negeri Jambi menyerahkan rakyat hingga kaki Gunung Berapi hilir hingga kuala Jambi mudik.*

Sultan Abdul Jalil, who possesses the throne of sovereignty in the state of Minangkabau, acknowledges as his son Sultan Abdul Muhyiuddin, who possesses the throne of sovereignty in the state of Jambi, granting him authority over the people up to the foot of Gunung Berapi, downstream to the Jambi river mouth and back upstream.

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**31** Ibid., 3.

**32** Ibid., 127, 207.

**33** Andaya, *To Live as Brothers*, 154n24, citing a Dutch translation of a letter to the Dutch in Jambi from the king of Minangkabau, received on January 2, 1712.

**34** Gallop, “Royal Minangkabau Seals,” 280–87.



Figure 4.6. Minangkabau seal of patronage issued to the sultan of Jambi. Impressed on a letter in Malay from Datuk Bendahara Putih of *gunung negeri*, Sungai Tarab *dar al-salam*, to Mr. Griffiths at the East India Company factory in Bengkulu (received November 1, 1799), SOAS MS 40320/11, fol. 122. Reproduced courtesy of the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

“Sultan Abdul Jalil” was a regnal title of Minangkabau sovereigns. But who was the ruler of Jambi named as “Sultan Abdul Muhyiuddin” on the seal, honoured by such a mark of support?

In common with other Malay states, each ruler of Jambi had a not inconsiderable number of names and titles, used at different stages of his life, and in different contexts. It is not always easy therefore to identify an individual ruler from the different appellatives used in a variety of sources ranging from early European reports to Malay chronicles to official documents such as treaties, letters and edicts, and, indeed, seals. With the introduction of the “animal seal,” each Jambi sultan is identified by both his Muslim regnal name and his Javanese title, but the situation is not so clear for the preceding period. Although no “Sultan Abdul Muhyiuddin” of Jambi is known, the name of “Sultan Abdul Muhyi” is confirmed by his own seal and a number of other sources as the name of the son of Sultan Agung, who ruled from



1679 to 1687.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, the historical chronicle of Jambi, *Hikayat Negeri Jambi*, assigns the name “Sultan Abdul Muhyi” to the elder son of Sultan Maharaja Batu, namely Sultan Astra Ingalaga, whose Muslim regnal name is otherwise unknown.<sup>36</sup> If there were indeed two rulers of Jambi named “Sultan Abdul Muhyi,” it is more likely that the “Sultan Abdul Muhyiuddin” to whom the seal was presented was Astra Ingalaga than his grandfather. First, it was Astra Ingalaga who owed his restoration to the throne to the intervention and recognition of the Minangkabau ruler. Second, this seal is almost identical in shape and inscription to the Minangkabau seal of patronage issued to Sultan Mahmud Syah of Siak (r. 1746–1760),<sup>37</sup> suggesting that the two seals can be assigned to a similar time period. The heavy hand of Minangkabau in the state of Jambi during the first half of the eighteenth century may thus offer an explanation for the introduction of the “animal seal,” either during the second reign of Sultan Astra Ingalaga from 1727 or with the succession of Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin in 1742, and a clue to the significance of the animals themselves may possibly be found in the Minangkabau myth of origin, the *Tambo Minangkabau*.

The *Tambo Minangkabau*, which recounts the legendary history of the Minangkabau polity, is known today from a large number of oral and written sources. Although the earliest dated manuscript was copied in 1824, on the basis of intertextual references in other Malay chronicles and documents, it has been proposed that the *Tambo Minangkabau* took on its present Islamic form in the first half of the seventeenth century.<sup>38</sup> According to the *Tambo Minangkabau*, Iskandar Zulkarnain, who was the youngest son of Adam and Eve, had three sons, named Sultan Seri Maharaja Alif, Sultan Seri Maharaja Dipang, and Sultan Seri Maharaja Diraja. After a tussle for the golden crown, the youngest son, Sultan Seri Maharaja Diraja—whose name echoes the title of the fourteenth-century king Adityawarman—was acknowledged by his two older brothers as the victor. Sultan Seri Maharaja Alif departed to become the emperor of Rum (that is, the eastern Roman empire and its Ottoman successor state) and Sultan Seri Maharaja Dipang became the emperor of China, while Sultan Seri Maharaja Diraja set sail

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**35** “Soeltan-Abdoe'l Mohji” (in Wellan, “De loge,” 449); and “Sultan Abdul Mahji” (in Tideman, *Djambi*, 83).

**36** Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies) Or. 72: see Iskandar, *Catalogue*, 762. In her edition of another manuscript (Leiden University Library Or. 2013), Indiyah Prana Amertawengrum (“Hikayat Negeri Jambi”) gives the name as “Sultan Abdul Mukhyi”; but in the reproduction of the microfilm of the manuscript shown on page 222 of her thesis, the name appears to read “Sultan Abdul Muhyi.”

**37** #659, reproduced in Gallop, “Royal Minangkabau Seals,” 283.

**38** Braginsky, *The Turkic-Turkish Theme*, 90.

for Sumatra, accompanied by a princess and four animals: a she-goat of the forest (*kambing hutan*), a learned dog (*anjing mualim*), a Siamese cat (*kucing Siam*), and a Cham tigress (*harimau Campa*). When the ship arrived at Gunung Berapi (Mount Merapi in west Sumatra) the animals turned into beautiful women, and the king married all four women as well as the princess. These five wives bore him five daughters, whom the king gave in marriage to the five master boatmen who had repaired his ship, and their descendants then populated the Minangkabau lands.<sup>39</sup>

The marriage between the first king of Minangkabau and the four animal-women has been interpreted by some anthropologists as uniting the patrilineal, male principle, representing the Minangkabau dynasty, and the matrilineal, female principle of Minangkabau's social structure, representing Minangkabau territory.<sup>40</sup> Others see the four animal-women as representing a range of different female characteristics.<sup>41</sup> In any case, compared to other origin myths of a wide range of polities throughout the Malay archipelago, very often involving marriage of a male outsider to a princess discovered in a clump of bamboo or in a mass of foam, the presence of four (extraordinary) animals among the companions of the founder of the kingdom of Minangkabau has been described as "a fairly unexpected feature"<sup>42</sup>—as unexpected, indeed, as the presence of four animals on the seal of the sultan of Jambi. I accordingly suggest that the iconic role of four animals in the ancient Minangkabau myth of origin offers the most plausible explanation for the design of the new royal seal of Jambi. Even though the selection of animals seen on the Jambi seals may not always tally exactly with those named in the *Tambo Minangkabau*, it should be noted that variant forms of the legend are known,<sup>43</sup> and that both the elephant (*Gajah Sakti*) and the buffalo (*Si Binuang Sati*) occupy positions in the pantheon of Minangkabau signs of greatness listed in chronicles and royal letters and edicts.<sup>44</sup> The design of the Jambi seal could therefore be seen as a masterly composition, placing the Islamic name of the sovereign in the centre, and harmoniously balancing in alternating petals in the border the symbols of the two rival cultural factions in Jambi: Javanese, associated with the downstream court at Tanah Pilih; and Minangkabau, the towering presence among the upriver communities in the highlands.

The design of the animal seal should perhaps also be considered in the particular context of chancery practice in Jambi. As noted above, to a much greater

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 96–97.

<sup>40</sup> De Josselin de Jong, *Minangkabau*, 101–2.

<sup>41</sup> Braginsky, *The Turkic-Turkish Theme*, 97.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> De Josselin de Jong, *Minangkabau*, 101.

<sup>44</sup> Braginsky, *The Turkic-Turkish Theme*, 103.

extent than in other Malay states, edicts and decrees issued by sultans and feudal lords to village chiefs have been carefully stored and kept in Jambi, in some cases surviving for over three centuries. These edicts were regularly retrieved and checked, and several are known to bear later annotations, amendments, and further seals as a sign of subsequent ratification. It is unlikely that many of the recipients were literate, and perhaps in Jambi there was a heightened appreciation for a royal seal that could be easily “read” visually. At least three noble Jambi seals documented from multiple copies of decrees dating from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries are highly unusual for Malay seals in iconographic terms. A seal of Pangiran Temenggung Kabul di Bukit, in fact, bears no inscription at all; it displays a complex intertwining shape intersecting with a small circle, emulating a four-petalled flower but also recalling certain magical and talismanic designs (#1408). Pangiran Temenggung Kabul di Bukit was the representative of the sultan of Jambi at Muara Mesumai, who acted as an intermediary between the sultan and the chiefs (*dipati*) of Kerinci,<sup>45</sup> and eight edicts bearing this seal are known, two of which date from the late seventeenth century. Two other seals are typically Malay in shape, eight-petalled circles, but with the inscription in the border and including an array of objects in the centre. One is the seal of Pangiran Suta Wijaya (#901), the pre-regnal title held by Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin, the first ruler of Jambi known to use an animal seal. This highly distinctive seal, recorded from about fourteen letters and edicts from the first half of the eighteenth century, contains a crescent, two small circles, and a two-bladed sword representing *Dhu al-Faqar*, the sword of the Prophet,<sup>46</sup> arranged in an unmistakably anthropomorphic assemblage eerily resembling a human face (Figure 4.7). The seal of Pangiran Temenggung Mangku Negara, found on four documents, is similar in composition (#1411). Against such a background, and with such a postulated audience, the creation of the “animal seal” of Jambi is perhaps less surprising than it might otherwise be perceived to be.

The design of the royal animal seal of Jambi is probably best regarded as an innovative and original creation of a masterly strategist at the royal court of Jambi in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. While the identity of the designer will probably never be known, he (or possibly she) might have been a royal scribe or artist or advisor at the court, and a few individuals who were active around that time can actually be named. Royal edicts sometimes bore the names of their writers, and one such scribe was Ki Astra Negara, who penned an (undated) edict issued by Sultan Astra Ingalaga, which is now held in the village of Muara Mendras.<sup>47</sup> As

<sup>45</sup> Kozok, *A 14th Century Malay Code*, 225.

<sup>46</sup> See Gallop and Porter, *Lasting Impressions*, 176.

<sup>47</sup> Gallop, “*Piagam Muara Mendras*,” 17–21.



Figure 4.7. Seal of Pangiran Suta Wijaya, later Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin of Jambi (r. 1742–ca. 1770), with an assemblage of objects in the centre, including the sword Dhu al-Faqar, resembling a human face, and inscribed in the borders *Ini cap Pangiran Suta Wijaya // Lā ilāha illā Allāh* (x4), “This is the seal of Pangiran Suta Wijaya // “There is no god but God” [Qur’an 47:19] (x4).” Documented on at least fourteen documents dating from 1709 to 1763 (the last perhaps used by his successor to the title). From a contract with the VOC, October 16, 1763, ANRI Riouw 68/7. Reproduced courtesy of the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia, Jakarta.

seals were a royal prerogative in the Malay world, relatively few matrices were made, and hence there were no professional seal engravers. Instead, seals were made as required by gold- or silversmiths, probably working from an inscription written out by a trained scribe. We have the name of one noble goldsmith in Jambi at that time, Ngabei Karta Laksamana, who was sent from the court upstream in 1722 to the gold mines at Tebo to negotiate between local people and incoming Minangkabau.<sup>48</sup> Such a combination of artistic and political skills might well characterize the creator of the royal animal seal of Jambi.

<sup>48</sup> Andaya, *To Live as Brothers*, 163.

## Conclusion

Although a few isolated examples of Islamic seals have been documented in Southeast Asia dating from the medieval period, a coherent Islamic sealing culture really begins to appear only around the turn of the seventeenth century. The main impetus for this development seems to have been the arrival in the region of the Dutch East India Company, which brought with it a zeal for treaty making with local states that exceeded that of earlier European powers, namely the Portuguese and Spanish. During the first century of their evolution Malay seals betray a rich range of international influences, primarily from the Islamic heartlands to the west. Thus the earliest known Islamic seals used in Southeast Asia, stamped on a letter from the sultan of Ternate to the king of Portugal of 1560, closely resemble Timurid seals of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and were probably imported from the Persianate world,<sup>49</sup> while the oldest known seal from Aceh, that of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah (r. 1589–1604), references Ottoman seals in style and engraving technique.<sup>50</sup>

By the end of the seventeenth century, however, the VOC had largely succeeded in imposing a trading monopoly across much of the archipelago, greatly curtailing the number of other foreign merchants entering harbours and ports in Sumatra, Java, Borneo, Sulawesi, and the Moluccas. Around the same time we can discern a more introspective “Malay” and less “international” flavour to Islamic seals in Southeast Asia. The range of Arabic expressions found on seal inscriptions becomes less inventive and more formulaic, talismanic formulae begin to creep in, and there is an iconographic shift towards traditional forms, with a marked preference for the quintessentially Malay lotus blossom.<sup>51</sup> And so, at a time of political crisis and factionalism in Jambi, when the royal seal was reimagined as a symbol of conciliation, the designer appears to have dug deep into history and retrieved, from the medieval legend of the origins of the Minangkabau kingdom, the emblems that would make Malay sigillographic history.

Seals have been standard-bearers of human cultures for thousands of years, dating back to the earliest known human civilizations. While in all cultures seals have performed essentially the same functions of securing property and verifying and authenticating documents, there is extraordinary variation in their distribution and mode of use; within societies, there could also be considerable fluctuations and hiatuses in the use of seals.<sup>52</sup> It is not usually possible to extrapolate from one

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**49** Gallop and Porter, *Lasting Impressions*, 34–35.

**50** Gallop, “Ottoman Influences.”

**51** Whereas before 1750 just 10 per cent of Malay seals have petalled circle shapes, in the second half of the eighteenth century the proportion rises to 37 per cent.

**52** See the editor’s introduction to this issue.

society to another, and thus detailed regional studies are needed to ascertain the precise mode of use of seals within one culture at a certain time. This focus on just one such seal—the royal animal seal of Jambi on the east coast of Sumatra in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—has shown how the sovereign seal was reinvented to function as much more than merely a symbol of authority. It was also loaded with the responsibility of embodying the fragile unity of the state.

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**Abstract** One of the most distinctive royal seals used in the Malay world of Southeast Asia was the animal seal of the sultans of Jambi in east Sumatra. From the middle of the eighteenth century onwards all successive sovereigns of Jambi used an eight-petalled seal with animals pictured in four of the petals. This was an exceptionally unusual choice for an Islamic sultanate, and it suggests that this seal was probably created at a politically critical juncture in Jambi history, as a bold graphic endeavour to unite, symbolically, the two contesting factions at the Jambi court: the Javanese elite, represented on this new seal by the sultan's Javanese title placed in the other four petals; and the Minangkabau power behind the throne, evoked by images of four legendary animals from the Minangkabau myth of origin.

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**Keywords** seals, Islam, Malay, Jambi, Sumatra, Javanese, Minangkabau, animals, lotus

# EXPRESSING NEW RULE: SEALS FROM EARLY ISLAMIC EGYPT AND SYRIA, 600–800 CE

PETRA M. SIJPESTEIJN

THE GREAT ARAB conquests of the seventh century CE brought the former Romano-Byzantine provinces of Syria and Egypt, along with the whole Sasanian Empire, under Muslim control.<sup>1</sup> Contacts between Arabia and these regions had already been intensive in the pre-Islamic period, resulting in the continuous exchange of knowledge, customs, and administrative practices. Influence and imitation did not simply flow in one direction; they were generative processes, in which forms and ideas were actively adapted to new political, religious, and cultural contexts. The practices and ideas that the Arabs brought to these conquered areas were similarly transformed through interaction with local models and customs, and in close relation to socio-political developments at the provincial and empire-wide level. These processes of exchange and adaptation reflect the political and social transitions set in motion by the Muslim conquests, which found expression in administrative systems, material culture, and religious-intellectual life—processes manifested in the seals used in official and private contexts. Seals continued to exhibit Byzantine, Sassanid, and Arabian habits, but their use and form also reflect the influence of developments under Islam. By comparing early Islamic examples with pre-Islamic ones, and by tracing the developments that occurred over time, I will explore the continuities and changes in usage, imagery, and linguistic expression in order

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I In the period under study in this article, the Muslim world formed one political unit that was ruled by a caliph, based in Medina (632–661), then in Damascus (661–750), and finally in Baghdad (from 750). It is clear that Islam did not exist at this time in the form that it became known later, based on the outcome of later debates. The terms “Muslim” and “Arab” were also understood differently, especially in the earliest period (e.g., Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*; Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*; Hoyland, “Identity of the Arabian Conquerors”). “Islamic” and “pre-Islamic” are used in this article as chronological terms indicating the time before the prophet Muhammad’s preaching and after it, while “Muslim” is used to refer to the political regime in place. As it is clear that the new rulers put in place administrative, fiscal, political, economic, and military structures that differed from local traditions as soon as they arrived, I feel it is justified to speak of a Muslim *empire* even if an imperial organization and ideology were still being developed. The term “Byzantine” refers both to the precursor of the Muslim empire in the eastern Mediterranean and to the Byzantine Empire, which continued to exist in Anatolia.

to show how these can be linked to the underlying ideologies and ambitions of Muslim authorities. In particular, I will examine how and why different practices unfolded in Egypt and the Levant, and I will compare these to the dissemination of shared forms throughout the Muslim empire, particularly the rich material from Khurasan in the east and al-Andalus in the west.

### Near Eastern Seals and Sealing Practices before and after Islam

The function and meaning of seals in the Near East, widespread from their first introduction in the ancient empires of Mesopotamia, did not fundamentally change in the thousands of years they were in use. By the late antique period impression and stamp seal matrices, mounted in rings or in conical form suspended from strings, had become ubiquitous.<sup>2</sup> By pressing the seal into wet clay, wax, or another mouldable material, an imprint was pressed directly into or fastened onto the object to be sealed. Seals were individualized through the display of names, titles, and functions; or by personalized symbolic illustrations or mottos. They could also be anonymous, mentioning instead institutions or pious formulae or bearing unidentifiable devices. They were widely used by people in all social categories.<sup>3</sup>

Seals served two main purposes: (1) identification and authorization, similar to modern-day signatures; and (2) protection, by preventing or restricting access.<sup>4</sup> A sealing representing an official institution or its functionary, when attached to a document, assured its validity. Since most actual writing was carried out by professional secretaries,<sup>5</sup> the seal's imprint certified the sender's identity and his licensed supervision of the transactions recorded and added credence to the message, because of its association with the official "behind" the seal, his office, and his status. The seal's imprint was thus a real and lasting reference to the presence and authority of the seal's owner.<sup>6</sup> This can be observed both in the sealings at the bottom of papyrus documents and from descriptions in papyrus letters. For

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2 Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 2. For seals and sealings from ancient Arabia, see the examples in the online database of the Corpus of South-Arabian Inscriptions ([dasi.humnet.unipi.it](http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it)) dating from the second millennium BCE to the sixth century CE. I would like to thank Ahmad al-Jallad for bringing these objects to my attention.

3 Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 100.

4 The use of seals in magic will not be dealt with here. For a discussion of the use of magical seals in the Islamic period, see Dorpmüller, "Seals in Islamic Literature"; and Soucek, "Early Islamic Seals," 250–52.

5 Platt, "Making an Impression," 241.

6 Verity Platt speaks of "an ongoing presence (and protective force) in the face of bodily absence": *ibid.*, 241–42.

example, an early eighth-century Coptic letter from an Arab official introduces an Egyptian tax collector to the taxpayers, recording that the tax collector is licensed and ending his letter with the phrase “I have written this letter and attached [an imprint of] my seal.” One can imagine the tax collector carrying the sealed letter of his superior on his visits to Egyptian taxpayers, showing it as a sign of legitimacy when needed. In an early eighth-century Greek letter, ‘Abd al-Malik b. Yazīd, pagarch (local administrator) of the district of Ihnās (Heracleopolite), writes to an Egyptian village community: “Make sure you get a receipt from the tax collector from your village with [an imprint of] his seal and make sure you do not pay anything more unless you receive a letter of mine with [an imprint of] my seal.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, witnesses to legal documents, merchants or other individuals, added their sealings to substantiate their written words and facilitate identification. Such sealings were fastened to the sides or bottoms of letters and legal documents and remained visible when the documents were being read (Figure 5.1a).<sup>8</sup> When attached to objects, sealings identified the addressee or sender, verifying their value but also impacting the handling and delivery of the goods, which were accorded greater priority and importance.<sup>9</sup>

Closure sealings, by contrast, secured access to the contents of a letter or container. They were attached in such a way as to close off (part of) a document, bag, or box, either by being attached directly to the container or to strings tying the articles up, or on textiles wrapping the objects.<sup>10</sup> Opening and displaying the contents inevitably broke the sealing, which was clearly and immediately visible. So the sealing restricted access to the contents, keeping them hidden or protected against tampering, until they were opened by a suitably authorized person. In many

**7** Both documents are discussed in Sijpesteijn, “Seals and Papyri,” 167.

**8** Weber, *Berliner Pahlavi-Dokumente*, 239–41, tab. III, doc. 3 – X, no. 10; XIV, no. 14; XV, no. 15; XXVIII, no. 28; Khan, *Arabic Documents*, 139, no. 24. Seals were suspended from strings at the bottom of Soghdian documents (Huff, “Technological Observations,” 383). For the application of a seal next to Ptolemaic testaments summarizing the contents, see Vandorpe, “Seals in and on the Papyri,” 235.

**9** Some Sasanian clay sealings show traces of fabric imprints on the back: Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 59. See also the lead sealing that seems to have been fastened to chain mail based on the traces left on the back of it: Ibrahim, “Notas sobre precintos.” The nail-shaped rivet on the back of a lead sealing bearing the name of caliph Hishām (r. 691–743) suggests it was connected to a container, possibly of wood: Amitai-Preiss and Farhi, “A Small Assemblage,” 233. See below, note 37.

**10** For a good overview of the kind of containers that could be closed off with a sealing, as discussed in Arabic literary sources, see Robinson, “Neck-Sealing,” 403n6. See also the account of cloth bales being sealed: Frye, “Sasanian Seals,” 160. For similar usages in ancient Near Eastern and ancient Egyptian contexts, see Regulski, Duistermaat, and Verkinderen, *Seals and Sealing Practices in the Near East*.

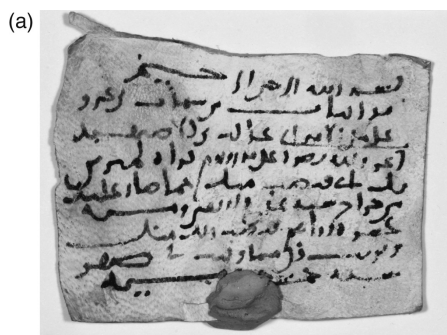


Figure 5.1a. Arabic tax quittance dated Šafar 150 (March–April 767), from Khurasan. The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art. DOC 15 (AR 23). © Nour Foundation. Courtesy of the Khalili Family Trust. (Cf. Khan, *Arabic Documents*, 104–5, no. 7.)



Figure 5.1b. A clay seal imprint is attached to the bottom of the document with a leather string tied through a slit in the document. It has the inscription: Shihāb, for God (*shihāb li-llāh*). Shihāb b. 'Amr is the financial administrator of the governor issuing the document.

cases, the closure sealing functioned simultaneously to restrict access, secure the contents, and to identify the goods, the owner/sender, or addressee, thereby functioning to authenticate and protect at the same time. In Bactrian and Pahlavi letters found in Central Asia and Iran, the sealings that closed the documents were typically attached to a piece of leather partially cut from the bottom of the document or affixed to a separate piece of fabric. Once the document was unrolled, the sealing remained attached, hanging from the piece of leather or textile.<sup>11</sup> The sealings referred to in the second letter discussed above similarly served a dual function. The seal's imprint on the closed letter assured the addressee that the contents had not been interfered with, while at the same time identifying the sender and conveying a sense of urgency, as well as corroborating the authenticity of the text. The sealing of the village tax collector would have identified the receipt as an official document, while simultaneously closing off the bottom part of the document containing a summary of the contents, which would remain secured

<sup>11</sup> For Bactrian letters, see, for example, Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents*, vol. 3, pls. 150, 151a, 151b; for Pahlavi documents, see Weber, *Pahlavi-Dokumente*, tab. XLI, images 3a, 3b.

(a)



Figure 5.2a. Poll tax receipt for the baker Aba Kire written in Arabic on papyrus, dated Ramaḍān 196 (May–June 812). The bottom part of the document was sealed. Under the seal impression, the amount, year and kind of taxes are repeated. Austrian National Library. P. Vindob. A. P. 644. Photo © Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. (Cf. Grohmann, “Probleme,” no. 18.)

(b)



Figure 5.2b. The clay sealing contains the name of the tax collector Yūnus b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān.

until the proper authorities needed to open it (Figures 5.4a, 5.8a)<sup>12</sup> (for a full discussion of this practice, see below). Interestingly, the text of such documents self-refer to their sealed nature, mentioning that they are sealed or that witnesses had added their sealing to the documents.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, in an early eighth-century Arabic

<sup>12</sup> See Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents*, vol. 3, pl. 72.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents*, vol. 1, 104 (doc. T).

(a)



Figure 5.3a. Legal document in Bactrian with one version visible and the other sealed off at the bottom (for an illustration of the document with its bottom half sealed and closed, see Sims-Williams, *Bactrian*, III pl. 72). The deed records a gift of an estate and of a female slave and is dated in the month Second New-year 478/June-July 700. A clause in the document states that “this contract has been sealed by my indulgence” and that two witnesses were present at the statement. The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art. DOC 10. Photo © Nour Foundation. Courtesy of the Khalili Family Trust. (Cf. Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents*, I, 98–105, no. T.)

letter, the head of an administrative district ordered his subordinate, who was responsible for the tax collection in a subdistrict, to consolidate the dinars from the different villages into one shipment and “then seal what you received with the seal which has been transferred to you.”<sup>14</sup> The seal transmitted to the local official

<sup>14</sup> Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 314–16, no. 8, ll. 19–20.

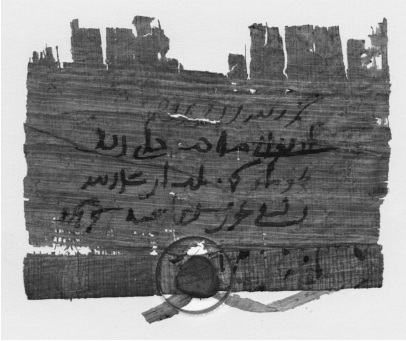


(b)



Figure 5.3b. Clay bulla with the image of a male buste.

(a)



(b)



Figure 5.4a–b. Sealed Arabic order of payment, dated 9 Ramaḍān 196 (May 24, 812): front and back. A seal closes off the bottom part of the document, which presumably contains a summary of the most important information in the document. Austrian National Library. P. Vindob. A. P. 1053. Photo © Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.

was presumably that of the district's head, or in some other way recognizable as belonging to the Muslim administration. The sealing functioned, on the one hand, to protect the shipment of gold coins, making sure that no one would be able to interfere with it en route, and, on the other, identified it as a government delivery.

Although the function of Near Eastern seals did not change much through time and the purpose of Muslim-Arab seals and sealings compares well to other





Figure 5.4c. Clay sealing containing pious formulae and the name of the finance director al-Ḥasan b. Saʿīd in whose name the receipt was issued.



Figure 5.5a–b. Umayyad two-sided lead seal imprint recording the poll tax payment made by the Jewish inhabitants of Tiberias. a: *khātīm kūra ṭabariyya*; b: *yahūd ṭabariyya*. No. 89.8.13190. Collection of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Photo © the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. (Cf. Amitai-Preiss, “A Poll Tax Seal,” 104–5.)

geographical and historical settings, the specific documentary contexts as well as the forms, materials, and imprints of the seals and sealings did vary. Two main processes were at play. First, in the Muslim world Arab, Byzantine and Sasanian material-cultural traditions travelled freely, blending into new composite forms, which also affected seals.<sup>15</sup> Second, political consolidation, on the one hand, and religious-political self-awareness, on the other, motivated administrative reforms, such as the Arabicization of the chancery, fiscal restructurings, and increased

<sup>15</sup> The same observation has been made for Islamic material culture in general (Grabar, *Formation of Islamic Art*) and, more specifically, for early Muslim weights (Khamis, “A Bronze Weight”). See also Knappett, “Imprints.”

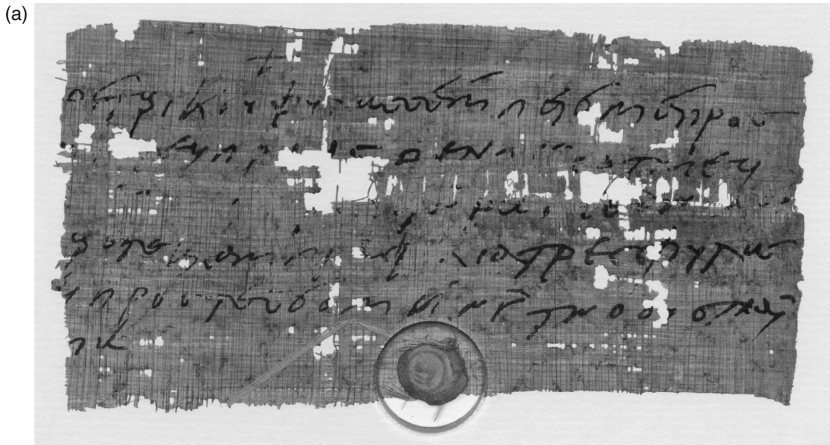


Figure 5.6a. Coptic official document from the seventh to eighth centuries. Austrian National Library. P. Vindob. K. 2579. Photo © Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.

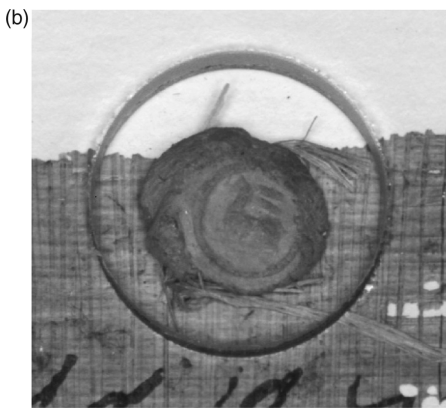


Figure 5.6b. Clay seal imprint depicting a sitting hare (Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 16–17, no. 3).

supervision of the movement of people and property—all of which are reflected in seals. While some of these measures are better documented at the provincial level, other developments can be connected to empire-wide transformations. Public administrative practices obviously interacted with those common in private commercial contexts, as both official and personal seals witnessed similar changes albeit at a different pace. Before examining these developments in detail, I will briefly discuss the material on which these observations are based.

### Profiling the Sources

Political and climatological conditions, in combination with scholarly, especially archaeological, preferences, have resulted in an uneven distribution of attested

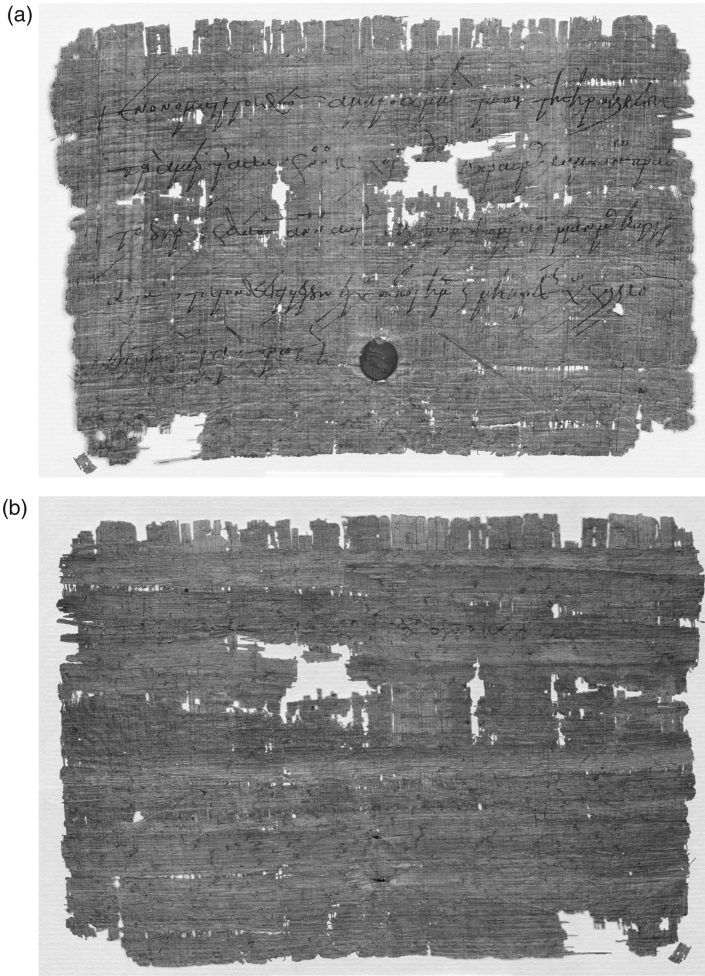


Figure 5.7-a-b. Delivery order written in Greek on papyrus from the governor 'Amr b. al-Āṣ (d. 664) to the administrator of Heracleopolis/Ihnās for maintenance of an Arab army unit: front and back. Austrian National Library. P. Vindob. G. 39724. Photo © Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. (Cf. Grohmann, *From the World*, 115–16.)

seals and sealings from the pre-Islamic and Islamic Near East. It is difficult to establish the extent to which practices and forms observed in a specific geographical context can be applied more generally. First, it cannot be assumed that the presence of seals in a given archaeological site indicates that the act of sealing objects and documents was practised at that site.<sup>16</sup> Seals served ornamental

<sup>16</sup> Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 58.

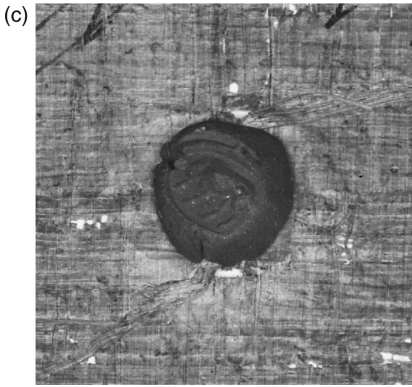


Figure 5.7c. Clay seal imprint belonging to the governor 'Amr b. al-Āṣ (d. 664) depicting a charging bull.

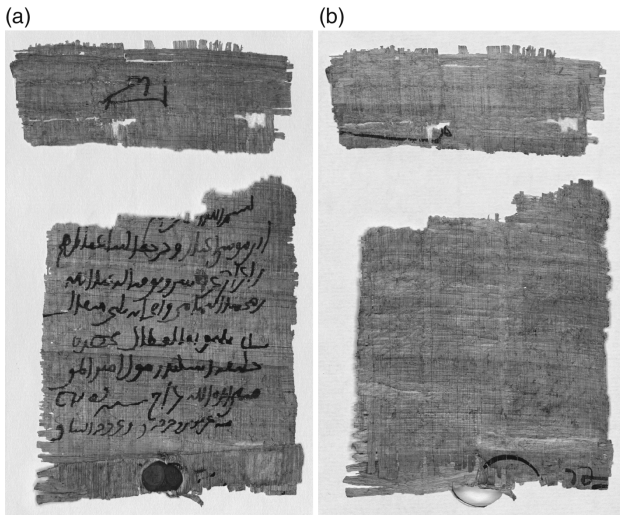


Figure 5.8a–b. Arabic tax receipt issued to a baker named Mūsā and a builder called George, dated 291 (904): front and back. The bottom part containing a summary of the document is rolled up and sealed with a seal attached to a string tied through the papyrus. Austrian National Library. P. Vindob. A.P. 3378. Photo © Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. (Cf. Grohmann, “Einige bemerkenswerte Urkunden,” no. 12.)

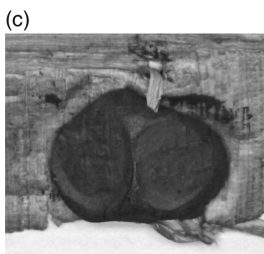


Figure 5.8c. The seal of the tax-collector Jalawayh is imprinted twice at the bottom of the document, with the two clay impressions at a 90°-angle from each other. Their inscriptions read: seal of Yalahwayh (*tābi' yalahwayh*).



(a)

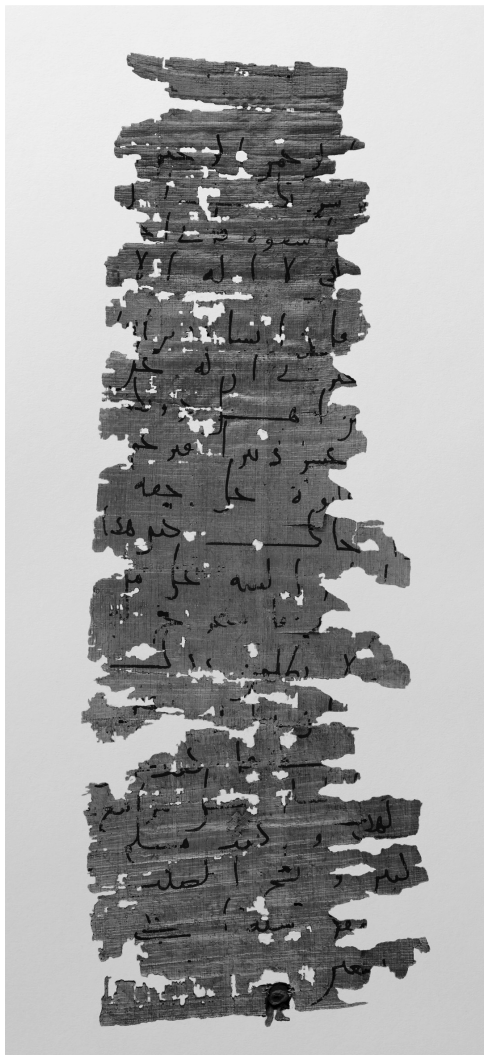


Figure 5.9a. Sealed letter from the governor Qurra b. Sharīk to Basileios, the pagarch (administrator) of Ishqūh/Aphroditō, dated Šafar 91 (December 709–January 710). Oriental Institute Chicago, D. 13296 (E. 13756). Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. (Cf. Abbott, *Kurrah Papyri*, 47–9, no. 3.)

purposes too, and mounted seals were worn as jewellery.<sup>17</sup> In Arabia, for example, seal matrices have been found, but sealings remain unattested. The cultural integration of Arabia into Near Eastern writing traditions, however, suggests that

<sup>17</sup> See also the much later signet ring seals, in which the writing appears not in mirror image, so as to produce a ‘correct’ text when stamped, but in regular script indicating these no longer functioned as proper seals.

(b)



Figure 5.9b. The clay seal imprint at the bottom of the letter shows a quadrupled animal with a star above its back.

sealing documents and objects was nevertheless practised in the peninsula. References to sealing do occur, moreover, in written texts.<sup>18</sup>

Byzantine, Sasanian, and Arab seals were all made of durable materials, such as precious stones, rock crystal, and metal, and were used both in metal signet rings and as block stamp seals.<sup>19</sup> Several of these seals have been the objects of study.<sup>20</sup> These seal matrices alone do not tell us much about their use, however. For this, seal imprints in lead, clay, or wax—the materials in use in this period and region—are needed, preferably attached to the objects that they authenticated. Indeed, there is uncertainty and even outright disagreement among scholars about how seals were used, by whom, in what context, and for what purpose, both in the Islamic and pre-Islamic Near East.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See below, note 75.

<sup>19</sup> Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 4. For signet rings, see *ibid.*, 41–43. See also Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals*.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*; Platt, “Making an Impression”; and Amitai-Preiss, “Faunal Iconography.”

<sup>21</sup> The application and usage of Sasanian clay seals, whether for objects or documents, and the explanation for the finding of multiple clay imprints together are fiercely debated.

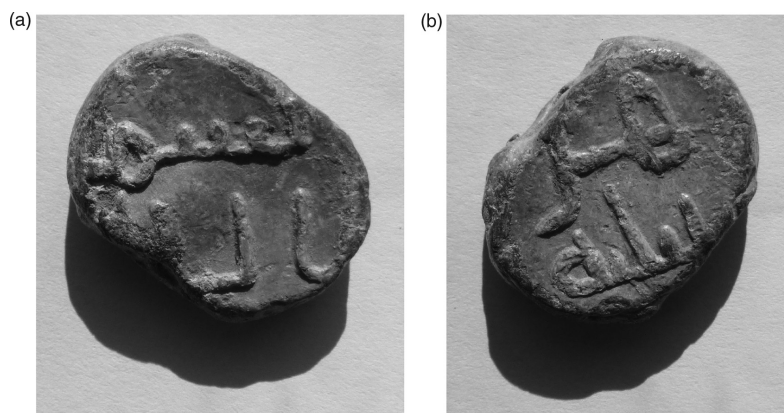


Figure 5.10a–b. Two-sided lead seal imprint recording the tribute or poll tax paid by the inhabitants of Seville, early eighth century: (a) *bi-sm allāh*; (b) *ahl ashbīla*. Private collection Tawfiq Ibrahim. [www.andalustonegawa.50g.com/Seals.html](http://www.andalustonegawa.50g.com/Seals.html). © Tawfiq Ibrahim.

While many imprints of seals have been found dating to the early Muslim empire — including in al-Andalus, Egypt, Syria-Palestine, Central Asia, Sicily, Sardinia, southern France, and Iran — and pre-Islamic Sasanian and Byzantine seal impressions have been unearthed in large numbers as well, many more undoubtedly remain to be found. The reasons for this are manifold. Covered in layers of deposits, lead seal imprints are difficult to detect even in an organized archaeological excavation. To the untrained and naked eye they do not look very impressive, and so often remain unnoticed.<sup>22</sup> Metal detectors can, to a certain extent, be used to

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See, for example, Frye, “Sasanian Seals”; Lerner and Skjaervø, “Some Uses of Clay Bullae”; Huff, “Technological Observations”; and Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*. The interpretation of the use of Arabic lead seals stating place names, districts, provinces, or named officials continues to be debated as well. An example is the discussion about the relation of some of these seals to the Muslim poll tax and whether they were worn by individual taxpayers as proof of their payments or accompanied transports of goods and coins. See, for example, Schindel, “Nochmals”; Robinson, “Neck-Sealing”; Balog, “Dated Aghlabid”; and Amitai-Preiss, “A Poll Tax Seal.” See also Ibrahim, “Additions,” 115. Further, the choice of illustrations on seals has been called “random” (Amitai-Preiss, “Faunal Iconography,” 212) and “intentional” (Gyselen, *Sasanian Seals and Sealings*, 8; Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 109–10; Platt, “Making an Impression”). The interpretation of the function of individual seals continues to be discussed as well. See the contested interpretation of ‘Abd al-Malik’s sealing (Grabar, *Formation of Islamic Art*, ill. 21), some arguing that it is, instead, a weight (Amitai-Preiss, “An Umayyad Lead Seal,” 233n2; Khamis, “A Bronze Weight,” 151).

**22** Note the lead and copper sealings first deemed to be too unimpressive to take to an antiquities dealer by the Sicilian farmer who found them (Balog, “Dated Aghlabid,” 129). Only

remedy this and have led to discoveries of lead seals in places where their presence was not initially suspected.<sup>23</sup> Yet this has meant that most seals are acquired not via controlled excavations, but via private purchases or on the antiquities market with little knowledge of their provenance.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, countless lead seals will never be retrieved because their material lent itself to reuse, either by restriking outdated imprints or by melting and reusing the lead for new seals.<sup>25</sup>

Even less likely to be found are clay imprints of seals. Sand-coloured and often damaged because of their brittle nature, they can be found and salvaged only through very intensive recovery methods (e.g., sieving). In addition, unbaked clay imprints quickly dissolve when brought into contact with water. Many seals were broken, either intentionally, when the objects to which they were fastened were opened, or accidentally, when the objects were moved from one place to another. Most clay impressions have been recovered when still attached to documents, usually on folded parts of double documents, which are more easily detected, or when they existed in large enough quantities (and of large enough size) to be noticed.<sup>26</sup> Even so, the number of known clay imprints is only a fraction of the number of lead seal imprints.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, the number of known lead sealings from the Islamic period is very small compared to the number of Byzantine lead imprints. This is to a large extent caused by the status of the field, since less archaeological work has been conducted on the Islamic period than on other periods in Near Eastern history—a situation that is, nevertheless, slowly improving. Rarest of all are wax sealings, which were less common in the Byzantine Empire than lead

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when metal detectors were used to examine the waste deposits removed by archaeologists from sites in al-Andalus could lead sealings be discovered (Ibrahim, “Additions,” 115n2).

**23** See previous note.

**24** Most lead sealings from the Arab Middle East originate in Israel, where the antiquities trade is well developed: Schindel, “Nochmals”; Amitai-Preiss, “An Umayyad Lead Seal.” None of the lead sealings from al-Andalus originate from controlled, scholarly excavations: Ibrahim, “Additions,” 115n2. From North Africa, on the other hand, none have come to light, though the presence of lead sealings in al-Andalus, France, and Sicily strongly suggests that lead sealings were also in use there: Balog, “Dated Aghlabid”; Ibrahim, “Additions.” The more northerly provinces, such as the Jazira, have also so far not yielded any sealings.

**25** Ibrahim, “Additions”; Cheynet, “L’usage,” 24; Huff, “Technological Observations,” 373–75; Ritter, “On the Development,” 104.

**26** For sealings connected to documents, see, for example, Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*; Vanderpe, “Seals in and on the Papyri”; Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents*; and Khan, *Arabic Documents*. For hoards of clay bullae, see Huff, “Technological Observations,” 375–76; and Vanderpe, “Seals in and on the Papyri,” 231.

**27** Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 4; Vanderpe, “Seals in and on the Papyri,” 231.



ones.<sup>28</sup> Although some wax sealings have been recovered on documents from the later Byzantine Empire, only two have so far been retrieved from Islamic Egypt.<sup>29</sup>

The dearth of actual seals and sealings, especially attached to documents, is partially compensated for by texts. Many documents contain information on the use of seals, discussing the sealing of documents or shipments, and referring to signet rings and other seals.<sup>30</sup> In the Greek papyri from the Islamic period, the word *bulla* is used for the sealing that appears on a document. Arabic papyri employ the terms *ṭābiʿ*, which seems to have been especially used in Egypt, and *khātim*, which was the more general term; both could also be used as verbs. These terms also appear on the seals themselves.<sup>31</sup>

### The Shape and Application of Seals

Arab-Muslim seals took different forms depending on their function and the context in which they were used. Sealings still attached to documents from Egypt, Iran, and Central Asia are all imprinted on one side only and are, with the exception of two wax imprints attached to papyrus, all made of clay.<sup>32</sup> The clay was shaped by hand, as the occasional fingerprints indicate. A small piece of clay was attached to the folded or rolled-up document, after which a string was tied through or around it over the clay and pressed into it. A ball of clay was added on top and a seal was pressed into it. In this way the string located in the middle of the clay seal was secure, and the seal was attached in the strongest way possible.<sup>33</sup> As discussed above, seals could also be attached to a partially cut-off part of the writing surface in such a way that they remained attached and visible after the document had been

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**28** Wax sealings had replaced lead ones entirely by the twelfth century in the Byzantine empire: Cheynet, "L'usage," 23.

**29** Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 8, 37, no. 27.

**30** Sijpesteijn, "Seals and Papyri"; Vandorpe, "Seals in and on the Papyri," 231.

**31** See below at note 95. *Khātim* occurs on seal imprints from al-Andalus and Syria-Palestine (Figures 5.5, 5.16) and in documents from Khurasan referring to the sealing at the bottom of the document (Figures 5.3a, 5.14a). *Ṭābiʿ* is attested on Egyptian glass stamps and on a seal imprint: see Figure 5.8c and Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, no. 29. It also appears on one lead sealing from Ilyā dated 101 (719/20): Amitai-Preiss, "Umayyad Vocabulary," 282. See also Soucek, "Early Islamic Seals," 237.

**32** Huff, "Technological Observations." The wax sealings are attached to papyri with Arabic protocol texts on the other side, indicating an eighth-century date: Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 8. For examples from Iran, see Weber, *Pahlavi-Dokumente*, tabs. XLI–XLIII; for Central Asia, see Khan, *Arabic Documents*. See also Grohmann, *Einführung*, 128–30.

**33** Vandorpe, "Seals in and on the Papyri"; Huff, "Technological Observations," 381; Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 74–75.

opened up (Figure 5.3a–b). Seals attached to the bottom of documents or to a part of the document that was folded over were attached in the same way, the only difference being that the string was tied via one or two holes in the papyrus or other material (Figure 5.4a–c).<sup>34</sup> This practice of sealing folded or rolled-up documents with clay sealings continued pre-Islamic Sasanian and Byzantine practices, and persisted in unchanged form until the middle of the tenth century, when the last such sealings are attested.<sup>35</sup>

While some of the larger clay bullae may have been used to secure bags and containers, it seems unlikely that the very vulnerable clay sealings were attached to objects on a large scale.<sup>36</sup> The imprints of strings, wires, or textile weaving on the unwritten back of clay sealings that have been used to argue for the use of clay sealings on objects more probably derive from their having been fastened to strings tying documents or to (textile) writing material directly.<sup>37</sup> The concave form of some larger clay sealings can also be explained by their having been attached directly to rolled-up documents.<sup>38</sup>

Lead, copper, and other metals were also used for sealings in the Muslim period, albeit not attached to documents. Lead sealings are attested with one-sided and two-sided imprints (Figures 5.11a–b, 5.12). The impressions on both sides were made with tongs, sometimes showing the same inscription, but in most cases inscribed differently on each side (Figures 5.5, 5.11a–b).<sup>39</sup> In some cases a wire seems to have

**34** See, for example, from Sasanian Iraq, Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 60; Frye, “Sasanian Seals”; from Iran, Weber, *Pahlavi-Dokumente*, tab. XXVIII; from Roman and Byzantine Egypt, Vondorp, “Seals in and on the Papyri”; from Islamic Egypt, Grohmann, *Einführung*, 128–29; and from Islamic Central Asia, Khan, *Arabic Documents*; and Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents*.

**35** The latest dated Arabic clay seal from Egypt was attached to a paper document with a tax receipt dated 342 (954/55): Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 39, no. 31. A paper document dated 960 was sent from Iraq by Neḥemiah Gaon to Egypt, where it ended up in the Genizah of the Ben Ezra synagogue of Fustāt. The seal imprint attached to the bottom of the document was made of two colours of clay and contains goat hair. The name of the Gaon appears on the sealing, as well as a wish for his long life. A twisted piece of paper was fastened through the sealing, while an additional piece of paper was fastened to the back of the sealing to fortify the writing support: Olszowy-Schlanger, “Early Babylonian ‘Documentary’ Script.”

**36** Scholarly opinions remain divided on this point: see Frey, “Sasanian Seals”; Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*; and Lerner and Skjaervø, “Some Uses of Clay Bullae.”

**37** Huff, “Technological Observations,” 379. For documents written on textile, see Weber, *Pahlavi-Dokumente*. See figure 5.17 in this essay.

**38** Vondorp, “Seals in and on the Papyri.” Rather than sticks or bundles, as suggested by Richard Frye, “Sasanian Seals,” 157.

**39** This continued Byzantine practice: Cheynet, “L’usage,” 24. A two-sided lead sealing mentioning the caliph Sulaymān (r. 715–17) was found in Palestine: Schindel, “Nochmals,” 118. For examples from Arab Syria-Palestine, see Amitai-Preiss, “Umayyad Lead Sealings.”

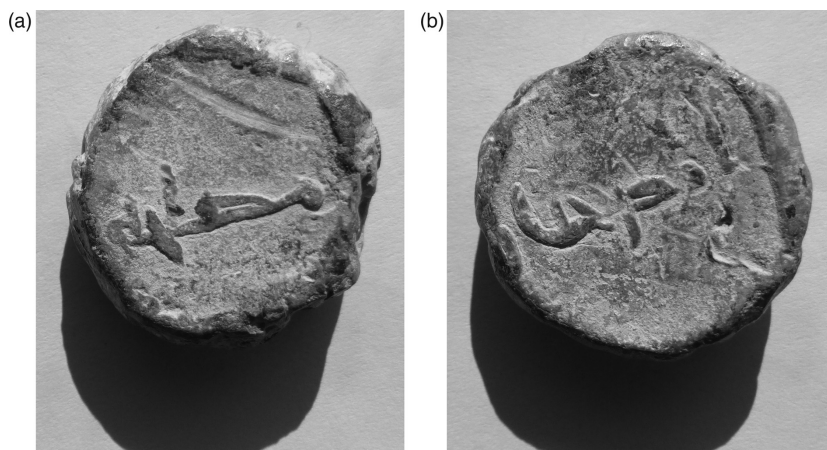


Figure 5.11a–b. Two-sided lead imprint recording the tribute paid by the inhabitants of the town of Jaen and its hinterland in compliance with the peace treaty concluded with the Arabs in the early eighth century: (a) *muṣālaḥa*; (b) *arḍ jayyān*. Private collection Tawfiq Ibrahim. [www.andalustonegawa.50g.com/Seals.html](http://www.andalustonegawa.50g.com/Seals.html). © Tawfiq Ibrahim.



Figure 5.12. One-sided lead seal imprint recording an order of 'Anbasa b. Suhaym, governor of al-Andalus (in office 721–725). The inscription reads: *bi-sm allāh hādhā mā amara bihi al-amīr 'anbasa ibn suhaym*. Private collection Tawfiq Ibrahim. [www.andalustonegawa.50g.com/Seals.html](http://www.andalustonegawa.50g.com/Seals.html). © Tawfiq Ibrahim.



Figure 5.13a–b. Two-sided lead seal imprint recording the order by al-Ḥurr, governor of Andalusia (in office 715–718) for the division of the tribute made by the province of al-Andalus: (a) *amara al-ḥurr qasm*; (b) *al-andalus*. Private collection Tawfiq Ibrahim, [www.andalustonegawa.50g.com/Seals.html](http://www.andalustonegawa.50g.com/Seals.html). © Tawfiq Ibrahim.

been pressed into the material at the time of striking, but other samples show that a channel was added at the time of striking or that a hole was subsequently drilled through the seal imprint to enable it to be fastened with a metal wire or string. Other sealings have a loop from which they are suspended like a pendant. One-sided lead sealings sometimes have an attached nail on the back to fasten them.<sup>40</sup> Such leaden sealings were not actually broken to open the containers, as only the wires or strings used to attach the sealing had to be cut in order to do so. Since a cut string with sealing could have been easily replaced by a new one without damaging the imprint itself, the secretive and protective function was also less pertinent than that of the clay sealings attached directly to the writing material after folding it. The more durable, but not very expensive, lead sealings seem, on the other hand, to have been frequently used to seal bags, containers, and boxes. Lead sealings could also be fastened to textile bags or sacks directly.<sup>41</sup> Some of the lead sealings seem to

<sup>40</sup> For a hole drilled through the sealing, see the references in Robinson, “Neck-Sealing,” 423n102; for wires inserted before the imprints were made, see Balog, “Dated Aghlabid” and Ibrahim “Notas sobre precintos”; for channels intended for wires made into the sealings, see Cheynet, “L’usage,” 24. Sealings with nails on the back were found in al-Andalus and Syria-Palestine: Amitai-Preiss, “Umayyad Lead Sealings”; Ibrahim “Notas sobre precintos.”

<sup>41</sup> Amitai-Preiss, “Early Islamic Lead Seals,” 111–14.

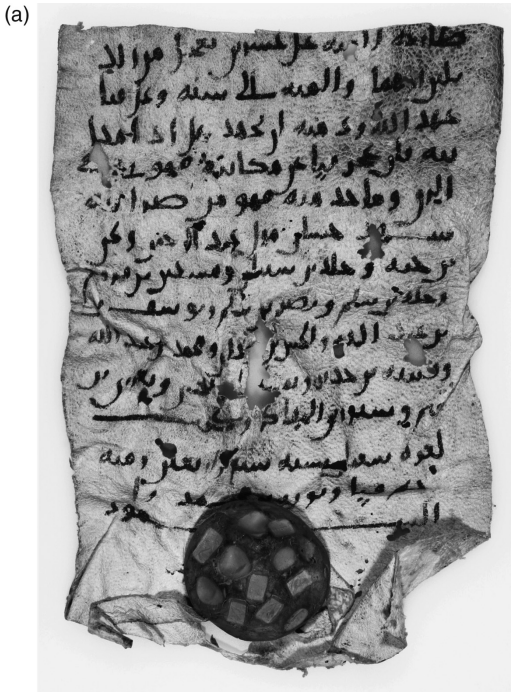


Figure 5.14a. Arabic legal document from Khurasan recording the emancipation of a slave, dated Sha'bān 146 (October–November 763). The document ends with the statement that the manumitted slave, the owner and the witnesses have added their seal (*khatama qiyā wa-būya ibn muḥammad wa-l-shuhūd*). The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art. DOC 35 (AR 12). © Nour Foundation. Courtesy of the Khalili Family Trust. (Cf. Khan, *Arabic Documents* 158–9, no. 31.)



Figure 5.14b. The clay seal imprint bears multiple imprints amongst which are astral images, including a small six-pointed star drawn above and below some names (Yahyā ibn 'Ubayd, Jahm ibn Qays, Mūsā for God, *mūsā li-llāh*) and pious formulae.

have been fastened to armour or clothing, as traces of metal rings or textile fabrics on the uninscribed back sides indicate.<sup>42</sup> There is no indication that lead sealings were used to seal documents in the early Islamic period, though they were used on contemporary, earlier, and later Byzantine documents.

<sup>42</sup> As the imprints on the back, which seem to have been made by metal rings as part of a ring mail indicate: Ibrahim "Notas sobre precintos."





Figure 5.15a. Tax quittance from Khurasan, dated Rabīʿ II 147 (June–July 764). The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art. DOC 29 (AR 9). © Nour Foundation. Courtesy of the Khalili Family Trust. (Cf. Khan, *Arabic Documents*, 92–3, no. 1.)



Figure 5.15b. Clay seal imprint depicting a five-pointed star surrounded by four small crescents attached to the bottom of the document.

It should be noted that all the functions that were fulfilled by seals made of different materials could also be achieved by pen and ink. Indeed, examples of this are attested. Lines and drawings on the outside of folded letters were positioned across folding and overlapping parts of the papyrus, thus forming an uninterrupted pattern as long as the papyrus or paper remained tightly folded.<sup>43</sup> Opening the document disrupted the pattern, which was easily discernible. The contents of a bag, container, or document, and the name of the addressee or sender, could also be indicated by writing on the container or document directly, or on a piece of textile covering the object (Figure 5.17). It is clear that the social and, in particular, the political position of the individuals involved determined the use of seals versus simple ink, though availability and personal choice cannot be ruled out either, especially in private contexts. Nevertheless, the use of seals was widespread in public and private domains.

Lead sealings may have been used to manage poll tax collection (see below). In exchange for the poll tax, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians received protection and the guarantee, at least officially, of peaceful coexistence under Muslim rule. Literary sources describe how, in late seventh-/early eighth-century Egypt and northern

<sup>43</sup> Vandonpe, “Seals in and on the Papyri,” 243.



Figure 5.16a–b. Two-sided lead seal imprint from the district of ‘Amwās in Palestine, eighth century: (a) *khātim kūrāt ‘amwās*; (b) *iqlīm bālū bayt būsim*. The inscriptions can be translated as: seal of the district ‘Amwās, the sub district of Bālū, [the town of] Bayt Būsim (?). No. 2006.33.26184. Collection of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Photo © the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. (Cf. Amitai-Preiss, “Islamic Lead Coins.”)

Iraq, non-Muslim taxpayers had to carry an identifying sign in the form of a lead seal imprint around their necks showing they had paid their poll tax. A group of ninth- and tenth-century lead sealings attests to this practice in a later period.<sup>44</sup> The amounts of 12 and 24 dirhams listed on the sealings compare exactly with the numbers listed in Arabic legal texts corresponding to two of the three categories of the poll tax for non-Muslims. Poll tax payments were adjusted to the economic position of taxpayers, with low, middle, and rich classes paying different amounts.

### The Arab Conquest and Early Muslim Rule

The seventh-century Arab conquests led to greater reliance on documentation and the increased employment of seals, as is visible on documents and preserved items from Egypt and Syria-Palestine. The new rulers did not completely overhaul the local administrative structures. Although government officials in the highest

<sup>44</sup> Robinson, “Neck-Sealing,” 427n125. Chase Robinson suggests that sealings containing references to the inhabitants of a province might have served the same purpose in earlier periods as the individual seals from the ninth and tenth centuries. He acknowledges that the reference to larger areas or regions makes sense only outside those areas and regions (“Neck-Sealing,” 424–25). Porter also only finds evidence for individual poll tax seals in the ninth century (*Arabic and Persian Seals*, 3–4). Nikolaus Schindel does not accept the interpretation of such earlier sealings according to which names of provinces or areas refer to payments made by individual taxpayers; rather, he considers these payments to have been made by or for non-Muslim communities as a whole (“Nochmals”).



Figure 5.17. Textile covering or container with the name of the addressee, ninth century or later. 12.855, no. 88. © Leiden University Libraries.

layers of the administration were replaced by Arab governors, security officers, and financial administrators, appointees on lower positions remained in their functions. This first generation was replenished from the same reservoirs: the highest positions by Arabs; the lower positions, both those in the countryside and those in the central administration, by indigenous non-Muslims belonging to the same local economic and social elite from which such administrators had been recruited in the pre-Islamic period.<sup>45</sup> The same individuals were in charge

<sup>45</sup> In Egypt, the Arabs appointed Egyptian pagarchs (local district managers) belonging to the same landholding class that the Byzantines had used: Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*. For Syria, see, for example, John of Damascus, whose family had served the local



of the same taxes according to the same structures as before, but change was also part of the picture. As the Arab rulers relied for a large extend on local expertise, experience and personnel, the prevailing sense was one of continuity in the daily life of most subjects. Nevertheless, some of the new measures did have an impact on individuals subjected to Muslim rule, starting soon after the conquest.<sup>46</sup>

Muslim rule led to an increase in administrative record-keeping. The difference is striking, with many more administrative documents being attested starting in the immediate post-conquest period, as well as more seals having been preserved from the Muslim period than from the previous period.<sup>47</sup> The Muslims were keen and active administrators, demanding extensive written documentation from their government officials and producing at least as much themselves.<sup>48</sup> Such emphasis on writing and written records also spilled over into the private sphere, where the use of seals on letters and legal documents also proliferated.

This increased documentary trail ran across multiple languages. The use of Arabic was introduced directly following the conquests to communicate with the subject population.<sup>49</sup> Greek, Coptic, and other local languages continued to be used besides Arabic, but Arabic functioned right from the start as an administrative language for official writings. The use of Coptic had increased in Byzantine Egypt, entering domains in which it had not been used beforehand, such as legal documents. This expansion continued under the Muslims, when Coptic began to be used also for administrative documents (Figure 5.6a).

The earliest documents preserved on papyrus from Egypt, as well as those on leather from Central Asia and Iran, also show that the Muslims introduced their own documentary practices and administrative habits. These practices differed from local traditions, but showed at the same time commonalities across the Muslim empire. In other words, practices observed in documents from al-Andalus, Egypt, Persia, and Central Asia show the same features, which set them apart from locally produced documents, and which were presumably introduced by

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administration in Damascus in the pre-Islamic period and continued to do so under the Arab rulers: Hoyland, *Seeing*, 480–89.

**46** For these developments in Egypt, see Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, chap. 2. Several additional observations appear in this article. For changes taking place in Syria-Palestine following the Arab-Muslim conquest, see Haldon, "Introduction: Greater Syria."

**47** Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 11.

**48** See also the observation, based on the information from lead seals as well as chronicles, that the Arabs executed in al-Andalus a "very diligent and efficient excise system of collection": Ibrahim, "Additions," 119.

**49** One Arabic and one Greek-Arabic document from Egypt date to the period of the conquest of the province. They constitute the earliest dated Arabic writings known, dating to 22 (643): Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 65.

the Arab conquerors.<sup>50</sup> In certain cases, such practices can in fact be connected to Muslim legal and administrative prescriptions and customs, known from the extensive Arabic literary documentary record, including legal treatises, theological tractates, chronicles, and administrative handbooks produced from the ninth century onwards. The question remains, however, whether this early Arab practice influenced the debates and prescriptions later recorded in these literary accounts, or whether both can be traced to practices introduced and inspired by a theoretical framework based on Islamic rules.<sup>51</sup>

Bilingual administrative documents from Egypt and Palestine show how the Greek and Arabic parts of the papyri were not directly translated from each other but, rather, that each linguistic part followed its own documentary and administrative conventions.<sup>52</sup> The Arabic documents exhibit a new technical vocabulary, different expressions that disclose a full-fledged documentary and managerial tradition, some of which overlaps with the local practices in the newly conquered lands.<sup>53</sup> This Arab-Muslim practice did not replace but existed side by side with local traditions. This combination of adaptation and continuity can also be observed in the use of administrative terminology and titles. “‘Abd Allāh,” slave or servant of God, which preceded the caliph’s name on coins, seals, and papyrus protocols and in monumental inscriptions, can be directly connected to similar terms used to refer to Byzantine emperors.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, the use of this part of the caliph’s title in Greek transcription, rather than Greek translation, in the Greek and bilingual Arabic/Greek protocol texts on papyrus suggests that the borrowing took place before the conquests.<sup>55</sup> The term *amīr*, used in Arabic literary texts for

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**50** As observed already by Geoffrey Khan, “The Pre-Islamic Background.”

**51** See, for example, the conditions discussed in an early eighth-century Arabic letter concerning the *hajj*, the Muslim pilgrimage. The vocabulary and contents of this letter resonate with later legal texts discussing the conditions in which someone is obliged to undertake the pilgrimage and the rules that apply to the religious journey. Without additional context, it remains difficult to decide whether the discussions in the letter describe customs and common expectations or religious legal prescriptions: Sijpesteijn, “An Early Umayyad.” See also Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 68–69.

**52** Khan, “The Historical Development.” For the differences between the Arabic and Greek texts of bilingual papyri, see Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 67–69.

**53** Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 69–71.

**54** *Servus Christi* (Latin) and *doulos tou Christou* (Greek), as observed by Nitzan Amitai-Preiss, “Umayyad Vocabulary.” While ‘Abd Allah as a personal name is surely widely attested in Arabia, no occurrence of it being used as title for a ruler can be identified with certainty (I would like to thank Ahmad al-Jallad for this information). For protocols, see Grohmann, *Protokolle*.

**55** Greek administrative titles do appear in transcription in Arabic texts (such as *māzūt* for *meizoteros* and *sammāk* for *symmachos*), while Arabic titles were sometimes translated into Greek (such as *symbolos* for “governor” and *prōtosymbolos* for “caliph”).

“army commander” and “governor,” is used in papyri, on glass weights, and on seals to refer to the governor.<sup>56</sup> Greek and Coptic papyrus texts, on the other hand, apply this term to local military-administrative officials, at the level of districts and larger administrative units, but not for the governor. The appearance of *amiras*, the Greek and Coptic transcription of the Arabic *amīr*, shows that no Greek or Coptic equivalent existed in the eyes of the scribes.<sup>57</sup>

As with other administrative practices, the Arabs introduced new sealing practices, while in other respects the use of seals continued pre-Islamic tradition. The first generation of clay sealings produced by the Arab conquerors in Egypt show pictures rather than texts. This exclusive use of images constitutes a break with Byzantine and Sasanian tradition, in which texts prevailed on official seals, including those used by civil servants in their official capacity.<sup>58</sup> In general, anepigraphic seals were more commonly used in the private sphere in the Sasanian Empire. Impressions in clay with single gem-like imprints as produced in Muslim Egypt continued Sasanian practice, albeit in smaller and more modest formats. No lead imprints used on documents can be dated securely to the immediate post-conquest period, even though these were common in the Byzantine Empire before and after the Arab conquest.<sup>59</sup> While the absence of text on administrative seals, as well as the size of the sealings, thus constituted a break, the images on Muslim clay sealings from Egypt of dogs, bulls, hares, birds, and figures of warriors or saints can already be found on pre-Islamic Byzantine and Sasanian sealings (Figures 5.6b, 5.7c, 5.9b).<sup>60</sup> Similar patterns can be observed outside Egypt, where the documentary evidence is more scarce, however. Literary texts report that early Muslim officials in Iraq also used seals decorated with animals and figures rather than texts.<sup>61</sup> Late seventh-century clay sealings excavated in Qasr-I Abu Nasr near Shiraz in Iran similarly depict animals, and their size is smaller than those from the Sasanian period, but the background of the seals’ owners is not clear.<sup>62</sup>

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**56** For papyri and weights from Egypt, see Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, chap. 2; for seals from Palestine, see Amitai-Preiss, “Umayyad Vocabulary” and “Four Umayyad Lead Sealings”; and, for al-Andalus, see Ibrahim, “Additions,” 119.

**57** Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 117–24.

**58** Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 62; Cheynet, “L’usage,” 25; Soucek, “Early Islamic Seals,” 238.

**59** Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 4.

**60** For Sasanian images, see Potts, *The Arabian Gulf*, 215; Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*; and Friedenberg, “The Evolution,” 2, figs. 9–11. For Byzantine images, see Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*.

**61** Soucek, “Early Islamic Seals,” 246n57.

**62** *Ibid.*, 245.

As expressions of material culture, seals reflected the development of Islamic art more generally. In the Muslim empire iconographic motifs and material applications circulated freely between the Byzantine and Sasanian cultural realms, resulting in new combinations of patterns, forms, and applications in new geographical and administrative contexts.<sup>63</sup> Some iconographic motifs attested on sealings in Muslim Egypt and Syria-Palestine can be related to Sasanian designs, especially the use of celestial bodies, stars, the moon, and the sun. The introduction of the Sasanian motif of a beaded border surrounding an image can already be observed in the “decorative frame of knots” around the picture of a charging bull on the seal of the Arab conqueror and first governor of Egypt, ‘Amr b. al-Āṣ (d. 664) (Figure 5.7c).<sup>64</sup> While it might be difficult to classify this as identifiably and specifically Arab-Muslim, the Muslims’ application of existing motifs, forms, and usages differed from local practice starting immediately following the conquest.

Not only the form and images on the seals changed. The Muslims also introduced innovations in the application of sealings in the conquered provinces that also point to Sasanian influence. One innovation was to use clay sealings to close off securely the bottom part of a document that contained a summary of the contents of the text written out in full in the main part of the document.<sup>65</sup> This practice is attested in documents from Muslim Egypt and Palestine. It was mainly applied to tax-demand notes and tax receipts, when the amount of taxes paid (or to be paid), the date, and sometimes the kind of taxes were repeated in the sealed-off part (Figures 5.2a, 5.4a–b, 5.8a–b). It was used in Arabic as well as Greek or bilingual Arabic/Greek documents, starting with a Greek papyrus dated 642 CE. The purpose is clear: in case of disagreement about the reliability of the visible text, the closed-off part could be opened to reveal the untouched, authentic contents.

The use of sealings to close off part of a document was introduced by the Muslims, but the practice had a precedent in the Near East. Egyptian Ptolemaic so-called double documents, for example, display a similar practice. These legal documents contained twice the full text of a legal transaction. After the document had been signed and concluded, one part remained visible, while the second text was sealed off.<sup>66</sup> Aramaic double documents were produced in Palestine

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**63** Grabar, *Formation of Islamic Art*. Note also the circulation of Byzantine bronze weights and the production of Egyptian-style glass weights throughout the Muslim empire: Khamis, “A Bronze Weight,” 149–54.

**64** Priscilla Soucek describes the “decorative frame of knots” without identifying it as Sasanian: “Early Islamic Seals,” 248. This Sasanian motif was introduced via the Muslim empire on Byzantine seals in the late ninth century: Walker, “Islamicizing Motifs,” 389.

**65** This innovation is extensively discussed in Sijpesteijn, “Seals and Papyri.”

**66** Vandorpe, “Seals in and on the Papyri.”

around the same period, but the practice is already described for the seventh-century BCE.<sup>67</sup> In Ancient Mesopotamia such double legal documents existed as well.<sup>68</sup> In Khurasan full double legal documents were produced in Bactrian into the Muslim period (Figure 5.3a).<sup>69</sup> The Muslim custom of protecting only a summary of the text is different and compares best with some procedures in Roman Egypt. This habit had disappeared from Egypt by the late Roman period, however, and there is also no evidence that it was practised elsewhere in the Middle East. Whether the Muslims had maintained an ancient custom in adjusted form, were exposed to it during the conquests, or revived this practice to fit their needs remains to be determined.<sup>70</sup>

The increased use of single-sided sealings for identification and authentication in Muslim Egypt and Syria-Palestine may also be connected to Sasanian administrative practice, which spread in the Muslim empire to other areas. The common mention in documents to the sealings that appear on them and to the sealings' function as a marker of authority and identification was a novelty in Muslim Egypt. Although seals were used to identify and verify Sasanian, Bactrian, and Soghdian documents, the practice was almost entirely unknown in pre-Islamic Egypt.<sup>71</sup> As the letters quoted above show, the use of clay sealings was common in the Muslim chancery immediately following the conquest of Egypt and closely follows the application of clay sealings in the Sasanian chancery. Single-sided lead seal imprints used for identification and authentication outnumber double-sided lead sealings used for closing and securing in Muslim Syria-Palestine. This is opposite to the situation in the province under the Byzantines, and relates also to Sasanian practice, whereby single-sided seals were the only ones in use.

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**67** Sijpesteijn, "Seals and Papyri." The prophet Jeremiah (627–586 BCE) took "the sealed deed of purchase containing the terms and conditions and the open copy" (Jer. 32:11). See also Jer. 32:14.

**68** With the copy of the tablet text written on the outside envelope. In case of disagreement, the envelope was broken to reveal the tablet inside: Lerner and Skjaervø, "Some Uses of Clay Bullae," 74n44.

**69** A depiction of this document with the bottom part closed off appears in Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents*, vol. 3, pl. 72.

**70** The practice of using stamp seals instead of signet rings was reinvented in the Sasanian Empire after several centuries of having been in disuse: Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*.

**71** In Roman Egypt the only example comes from tax receipts to be presented at checkpoints on the desert roads out to the oases, which contained authentication seals of the fiscal officials: Vandorpe, "Seals in and on the Papyri," 250–53. For Soghdian and Sasanian practice, see Huff, "Technological Observations," 382–83. For Bactrian, see Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents*, vols. 1 and 2.

## Arab Seals and Sealing

Although no examples of sealings applied to documents are attested in pre-Islamic Arabia, written references and archaeological finds suggest that seals were regularly used for authentication and to regulate access. By the time ink-written documents were in common use, from the fourth century CE at the latest, sealings were most probably applied in similar ways in Arabia as in the Byzantine and Sasanian contexts. These practices continued in the early Muslim community in Arabia and influenced practices in the provinces conquered in the seventh century.

Even before documents were in use in Arabia, practices can be observed that paved the way for the use of sealings for authentication and the control of access to written texts. The practice of sealing to close off and lock items was widely known in pre-Islamic Arabia, where seals made out of precious stone and metal have been found. Sasanian (but not Byzantine) seals have been found on the eastern Arabian Gulf coast.<sup>72</sup> Himyarite (110 BCE–ca. 520 CE) seals have been unearthed in south Arabia carrying depictions of figurines and animals often accompanied by writing.<sup>73</sup> The seals vary from gem-like precious stones for use in rings or worn on necklaces to metal stamp seals with a loop on the back to facilitate stamping.<sup>74</sup> Identification practices were applied already in writings incised in stone. The use of personalized ways of signing (*ʿalāma*) can be recognized in pre-Islamic rock inscriptions present all over the peninsula, in which authors identified their writings through specific ways of inscribing their name or adding symbols to their texts. The most explicit reference to the use of seals in ancient Arabia comes from a third-century Sabaic letter written on palm wood found in Yemen. The writer orders the addressee to “seal it [a document] with seal and wax.”<sup>75</sup> How the seals would have been attached to the wooden documents remains an open question. The editor of this text, Peter Stein, suggests that the holes that appear on the left

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<sup>72</sup> In Tarut (Potts, *The Arabian Gulf*, 215), in the United Arab Emirates (Kennet, “Transformations,” 154), and in Bahrain (Lerner and Skjaervø, “Some Uses of Clay Bullae,” 71).

<sup>73</sup> A black stone seal shows a three-faced head of a man and a Himyarite inscription with a name: Beeston, “Old South Arabian Antiquities,” 22–23, pl. III. A sardonyx seal has a depiction of an eagle with open wings standing on a bucranium with a star next to it and a late Sabaic inscription: Beeston, Pirenne and Robin, *Corpus des inscriptions*, 601–2.

<sup>74</sup> See the 156 seals described in the *Corpus of South-Arabian Inscriptions* (dasi.humnet.unipi.it) dating from the second millennium BCE to the sixth century CE.

<sup>75</sup> Stein, *Die altsüdarabischen Minuskulinschriften*, 32. Other documents written on palm leaves equally mention the use of wax sealings (e.g., *ibid.*, 324, 541). I would like to thank Michael C. A. Macdonald, Ahmad al-Jallad, and Peter Stein for their help locating references to sealing practices in the ancient Arabian material.

extremity of several of the legal documents might have been to suspend a string and seal.

The influence of Near Eastern writing and sealing practices was facilitated by the introduction of the Arabic script on the Arabian Peninsula in the fourth century CE. Developed out of the Nabatean alphabet, Arabic is not an epigraphic system moulded in clay or carved in stone but, rather, a “pen-and-ink” writing system applied to parchment, leather, and animal bones, and probably also papyrus.<sup>76</sup> The ancient Arabs’ interaction with the world around them was regular and intense, with writing habits being one of the many practices exchanged. Already, in the pre-Islamic period, Arab merchants, pilgrims, and travellers moved around the known classical world, while goods and objects—gifts, merchandise, utensils—from outside the peninsula circulated in Arabia. Documents, as well as the paraphernalia used to produce them, would surely have accompanied some of these movements.

One likely venue of cultural exchange was the Arab Christian tribes who worked in the service of Byzantines and Sasanians to defend the desert borders. The Arab Christian Ghassanids and Lakhmids were thoroughly integrated into the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires respectively. The close affinity and interaction between Ghassanids and Arabians explains to a great extent the direction and sequence of the seventh-century Arab conquests. It also elucidates the continued use of Byzantine administrative practice and instruments in Muslim Syria-Palestine and Egypt, as well as their spread throughout the Muslim empire.<sup>77</sup> The Ghassanid and Lakhmid use of seals thus most probably influenced pre-Islamic Arabian usage, and explains the spread of Sasanian and Byzantine practice in the Muslim empire later on. The Ghassanids and Lakhmids were important cultural brokers whose experience with Byzantine and Sasanian administration and rule served the early Muslim empire well. A lead imprint of the last Ghassanid king, which depicts Christian symbols in combination with the Greek language,<sup>78</sup> shows what form this influence might have taken.

It is clear that the earliest Arab-Muslim community in Arabia was indeed familiar with seals. When the prophet Muḥammad (d. 632) was allegedly told that foreign rulers would not accept his letters inviting them to join Islam without his personal seal attached, he decided to adopt one for himself. Reports differ as to what image was depicted, some stating it was a lion or human figure, others that

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**76** Macdonald, “Ancient Arabia.” See similar observations concerning the switch from cuneiform to Aramaic in Mesopotamia: Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 108. For the presence of papyrus as a writing material in Arabia, see Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 1.

**77** See, for example, the introduction of Aramaic-Greek terms by the Arabs in Egypt: *ibid.*, 70n52.

**78** The seal of the last Ghassanid king, Gabala patrikios (d. 640/41), contained crosses and a Greek legend: Shahid, *Byzantium*, 159.

it was a legend with the words “Muḥammad is God’s messenger.”<sup>79</sup> The Qur’an mentions the use of legal documents to ensure the correct recording of a transaction, adding that witnesses should be used when it is impractical to write the transaction down (Q 2:212). The use of seals to close off or lock is also attested in the Qur’an. Unbelievers who refuse to respond to God’s message are described as having their hearts and ears sealed by God (*khatama* Q 2:7; 6:46; 36:65; 42:24; 83:25). Muḥammad’s identification as the seal (*khātim*) of the prophets (Q 33:40), is generally interpreted as meaning that he was the last prophet sent by God: his prophecy completed and closed the row of Old and New Testament prophets, as a sealing finalizes and secures a container or document.

Adaptations and reshaping surely followed the introduction of governmental practices and instruments in Arabia in response to local norms, implementation and usage, with a particular Arabian praxis developing as a result. As no documents dating from the earliest history of Islam have been preserved from Arabia, the only way to deduce such practice is from the changes implemented by the Muslims in the areas they conquered.

### Arabicization and Islamicization

As discussed above, documentary practices, including the application and form of seals used on documents and goods, show that certain changes followed soon upon the Arab conquest in Egypt and Syria-Palestine. Information from other areas of the Muslim empire suggests that such changes occurred elsewhere too. In many ways, however, administrative routine was unaltered, and change is partially explained by the introduction of known practices into new geographical contexts and for different administrative purposes.

It took another couple of decades following the conquests before the Muslim rulers implemented a concerted programme of revision in administrative instruments, organization, and institutions. Initiated under the Umayyad dynasty (661–750) from its capital, Damascus in Syria, administrative reforms continued to be regionally expressed as they interacted with local needs, usages, and conventions. Under Caliph Mu’āwiya (r. 661–680), significant changes can be observed in administrative organization and practice in the papyri from Egypt and

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<sup>79</sup> Alan and Sourdel, “Khaṭām.” The appearance of the latter text stamped with ink on the letters written on leather ascribed to the prophet Muḥammad must date from the time (tenth century CE onwards) when such practice of stamping seals with ink had replaced the custom of using clay seals. The use of an Arabic text rather than an image would set Muḥammad’s seal apart from contemporary use by other Muslims. See above at notes 60 and 61 for examples of figural seals from early Islamic Egypt and Iraq.



Syria-Palestine.<sup>80</sup> Mu'āwiya is the first caliph whose name might have appeared on a bilingual Arabic/Greek papyrus protocol—preceding an Arabic/Greek note (54/674) from Nessana in Palestine requesting the delivery of oil and wheat to an Arab army unit.<sup>81</sup> His name is reportedly also the first to appear on monumental inscriptions. Mu'āwiya is, moreover, credited with installing a bureau of seals and putting a special official in charge of it, but, as we noted, the Muslim administration also used seals before that period.<sup>82</sup>

Further changes were implemented at the end of the seventh century and the beginning of the eighth under the Umayyad Marwanid dynasty (684–750). Modifications in the administration aimed at increased monitoring, centralized control, standardization, and professionalization were enacted throughout the Muslim empire. The goal was surely to increase the fiscal income from the areas under caliphal control, which had become especially urgent when proceeds in the form of booty had substantially diminished with the slowing down of the conquests. An amplified self-awareness and self-confidence among the rulers, whose regime had survived fifty years of counter-attacks, civil war, and apparent imminent collapse but now seemed certain to stay, was also expressed in a desire for further Islamicization and Arabicization.

The narrative sources indeed assign 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705), and his sons who succeeded him, an ambitious programme of reforms. The Marwanid caliphs are more present in the documentary record in and outside Syria, their immediate area of governance. 'Abd al-Malik is the first caliph whose name appeared on lead and glass weights from Egypt and Syria-Palestine.<sup>83</sup> His name also appears on an administrative papyrus from Nessana, while numerous papyrus protocols are issued on behalf of his sons.

Arabicization of the administration was realized in different ways. The language of the chancery was decreed to be exclusively Arabic at the expense of local languages. The numismatic evidence, which is probably the most widely known and studied, shows a slow process of reform, with images being gradually superseded by the exclusive use of Arabic writing. Lead and bronze weights show a similarly gradual evolution from pre-Islamic via mixed to exclusively Arabic-Islamic forms.<sup>84</sup> It is from this time too that lead sealings bearing Arabic-only

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**80** Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*.

**81** Kraemer, *Excavations at Nessana*, no. 60. See, however, the objections to the *editio princeps*, including the identification of this papyrus as a protocol, in Sijpesteijn, "Arabic Script and Language in the Earliest Papyri."

**82** Abbott, *The Qurrah Papyri*, 28.

**83** Grabar, *Formation of Islamic Art*, ill. 21; Khamis "A Bronze Weight," 151.

**84** Khamis, "A Bronze Weight."

legends are attested, recording contributions by towns, administrative districts (*ajnād*), or whole provinces (*miṣr*; *filasṭīn*; *al-andalus*) (Figures 5.5, 5.10, 5.11, 5.12, 5.13, 5.16, plate 5.1).<sup>85</sup> These seals show a standardized formulation and use of technical terms.<sup>86</sup> Egyptian papyrus protocols too start to appear in bilingual Arabic/Greek (as opposed to exclusively Greek ones) around this time, with the earliest caliph mentioned being al-Walīd (r. 705–715) and the first entirely Arabic protocol dating to Caliph Hishām (r. 724–743).<sup>87</sup> It appears therefore that the introduction of Arabic on public objects transcending local usage was generally applied throughout Syria-Palestine and Egypt in more or less immediate response to the court-initiated programme.<sup>88</sup>

Local languages continued to be used and learned in the Muslim chancery for a time, appearing on administrative instruments such as seals, coins, weights, and documents. In Egypt Greek continued to be actively used into the ninth century, while Coptic was used for local administration even longer. In Syria-Palestine Syriac and Aramaic disappeared more quickly in the face of Arabic. In Egypt Greek lingered on seals, even on those used by Muslim officials, into the eighth century. Images too continued to figure on the clay seals of officials in Egypt (Figures 5.6b, 5.9b). Similarly, in Khurasan depictions of animals and other images persisted on official seals into the middle of the eighth century (Figures 5.3b, 5.14b, 5.15b).<sup>89</sup> Eighth-century bronze and lead weights from Egypt, Syria-Palestine, and Iraq show both the continued use of Greek alongside Arabic and the application of pre-Islamic imagery.<sup>90</sup>

In spite of this transition period, a firm trend towards a specifically Arab(ic)-Islamic sealing usage and practice is visible in the clay and metal sealings from the eighth century onwards and from all over the Muslim empire. Some striking features were introduced on the sealings, which cannot be traced back to Byzantine or Sasanian practice. Others show how Sasanian practice, sometimes combined with local “Byzantine” traits, was introduced in Egypt and Syria-Palestine. A first difference concerns the identification of officials on the seals. Arab(ic)-Islamic seal inscriptions are specifically characterized by the general absence of titles. While Byzantine and Sasanian seals mention the (name and)

**85** Amitai-Preiss, “Umayyad Lead Sealings,” 19–20; Schindel, “Nochmals” and “Eine Umayyadische Bleibulle,” 118–21.

**86** Amitai-Preiss, “Umayyad Vocabulary.”

**87** Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 110–11.

**88** In general on ‘Abd al-Malik’s reforms, see Robinson, *‘Abd al-Malik*, chap. 4.

**89** Sijpesteijn, “Seals and Papyri”; Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*; Khan, *Arabic Documents*, 83. The district manager of the Fayyum (in office ca. 720–750), Nājid b. Muslim, used a seal with his name written out in Arabic and Greek.

**90** Khamis, “A Bronze Weight.”

title or office of officials, Arab(ic)-Islamic seals contain only personal names, either written out or symbolized by an image, sometimes in combination with a pious formula (Figures 5.1b, 5.9b).<sup>91</sup> This conforms to the practice in use within the papyri in which bilingual Greek-Arabic texts show the common application of titles in the Greek part while the Arabic section lacks such attributions, emphasizing instead lineage and membership via patronymics and other community identity markers.<sup>92</sup> Only the governor and caliph are regularly referred to as *amīr* and *amīr al-mu'minīn* respectively, possibly an indication of their elevated status (Figure 5.12).<sup>93</sup>

Two other innovations on Arab(ic)-Islamic seals, which break with Byzantine and Sasanian usage, are related to technical terms and expressions attested on the sealings themselves. The first concerns the addition of years to lead sealings imprinted on bags or containers (Plate 5.1a–b).<sup>94</sup> This practice is first attested on a series of lead and brass seals recording tax payments “by the inhabitants of Egypt,” which carry dates between 93 and 95 AH (712–714 CE). Such use of dates occurs only on “impersonal” seals—that is to say, on seals referring to institutions, offices, the Muslim chancery, or administration in a general sense, without mentioning personal names. The use of words referring to the seal on the sealing itself is another practice that is not found on pre-Islamic seals but appears for the first time on eighth-century Arabic seals. The words “seal” (*khātim*) and “stamp” (*ṭābiʿ*) are attested on the sealings and discussed in the documents on which the sealings appear (Figures 5.3a, 5.5a, 5.8c, 5.14a, 5.16a).<sup>95</sup>

Another group of eighth-century lead seal imprints listing administrative territorial divisions, but with no names of officials in charge, is the product of measures to professionalize the Muslim bureaucracy. Mostly from Filastin but also from al-Andalus and Egypt, these sealings combine names of towns, subdistricts (*iqlīm*), districts (*kūra*), or entire provinces (Figures 5.5a–b, 5.10a–b, 5.16a–b; Plate 5.1a–b).<sup>96</sup> They record annual tax payments and refer to the Muslim tax-collecting authorities as an institution rather than a person, thereby reflecting the

<sup>91</sup> For Byzantine seal inscriptions, see Cheynet, “L’usage,” and Amitai-Preiss, “Umayyad Vocabulary”; for Sasanian examples, see Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 61–62.

<sup>92</sup> Grohmann, *From the World*, 121; Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 67–68.

<sup>93</sup> See also Amitai-Preiss and Farhi, “A Small Assemblage,” no. 1.

<sup>94</sup> No dates were used on Byzantine seals: Balog, “Dated Aghlabid,” 127.

<sup>95</sup> See above at note 31. Amitai-Preiss, “Umayyad Vocabulary,” 281–82; Alan and Sourdell, “Khaṭām.” For the use of *ṭābiʿ* in the papyri, see Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 317–18.

<sup>96</sup> Amitai-Preiss, “Kūra and Iqlīm.”

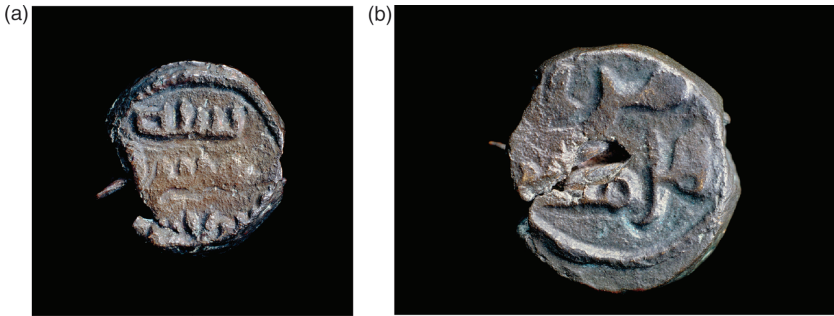


Plate 5.1a–b. Copper seal recording a tribute or poll tax payments made by the inhabitants of Egypt in the year 95 (713/14): (a) *min ahl miṣr*, (b) *sanat khams wa-tisa'in*. Walker, *Catalogue*, 295; Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals*, p. 28, no. 9; British Museum, 00803873001. © Trustees of the British Museum.

administrative reorganization of the early eighth century, when Muslim administrative bureaucrats replaced local Christian and Jewish landholding office holders.

Again, the Egyptian papyri offer further information, in this case about the territorial division in place and about the process of administrative transformations as referenced on the sealings as well. At the lowest level in the administration stood the villages, rural estates, monastic communities, and urban neighbourhoods. Village headmen and other local representatives were responsible for the collection of taxes from individual taxpaying residents in the communities. Initially operating as an intermediary between the Muslim authorities and the indigenous taxpayers, these local representatives had also been responsible for the division of the taxes imposed in one lump sum on the communities. From the early eighth century onwards tax collectors, still drawn from the indigenous population, lost this autonomy and operated in the service of the Muslim fisc, which assigned taxes on individual taxpayers directly. The local collectors brought the taxes gathered from individual taxpayers to a subdistrict, called an *iqlīm* in Syria-Palestine and *ḥayyiz* in Egypt (Figures 5.2a, 5.16a–b). From there the taxes of the different communities were forwarded in one lump sum to the district capital (*madīnat al-kūra*). From the district the payments were dispatched to the next level in the administrative geography of the province. In Egypt the districts were in direct contact with the provincial capital until a subdivision in Upper and Lower Egypt was introduced in the ninth century. In Syria-Palestine the *ajnad* functioned as supraregional administrative units that also played a military role. Then the taxes advanced to the capital of the province. At the provincial capital the tax taken was used to pay stipends to Muslim inhabitants according to their place on the *dīwān* (register), to contribute to the maintenance of the land, the upkeep of the road system and other public services, and the sustenance of the governor and his entourage, and, finally, to send as dues to the caliph's

court.<sup>97</sup> In spite of the continuous complaints that payments from the provinces were missing, insufficient, or late, the sealings referring to payments made by the (inhabitants of) provinces make it clear that these payments were indeed destined for the caliphal capital (Figure 5.13a–b; Plate 5.1a–b).<sup>98</sup>

Some of the “impersonal” sealings that reflect the new administrative order put in place in the early eighth century seemingly record the payment of poll tax contributions by non-Muslim subjects. Such sealings are known from Egypt and Palestine from the time of Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik onwards (Figure 5.5a–b; Plate 5.1a–b).<sup>99</sup> Papyri report that poll tax payments were in fact already in place, newly introduced by the Arab rulers, directly following the conquest in Egypt, as they were presumably elsewhere.<sup>100</sup> In al-Andalus similar seals were used immediately following the Arab conquest in the early eighth century to record payments made by communities on the Iberian Peninsula (Figures 5.10a–b, 5.11a–b, 5.13a–b).<sup>101</sup> Such poll tax or tribute payments contain a place name, sometimes accompanied by a reference to the stamp having been issued in the place (e.g., *bi-ludd*, “issued in Ludd”), or that this is the seal of the town (e.g., *khātim ludd*, “Ludd’s seal”)<sup>102</sup> or district (*khātim kūrat ‘asqalan*; *kūrat ‘amwās*).<sup>103</sup> Payments for a whole province are also referred to on such seals (*qasm al-andalus*, “allotment of al-Andalus” [Figure 5.13a–b]).<sup>104</sup> In some cases a reference to the (non-Muslim) population appears as well (e.g., *min ahl miṣr*, “from the people of Egypt” [Plate 5.1a–b];<sup>105</sup> *bi-sm llāh ahl ashbīla*, “in the name of God, the people of Seville” [Figure 5.10a–b];<sup>106</sup> *khātim kūra ṭabariyya*, “seal of Tiberias”; *yahūd ṭabariyya*, “Jews of Tiberias” [Figure 5.5a–b]),<sup>107</sup> or to the peace treaty that gave rise to the payments (e.g., *muṣālaḥat libīra*,

**97** Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 85–91; Amitai-Preiss, “Islamic Lead Coins,” 15.

**98** Robinson, “Neck-Sealing.” See also the list of payments made by the province of Egypt in the years 221–278 AH (836–892 CE) recorded on a papyrus found in Samarra in which Egypt figures prominently: Reinfandt, “Administrative Papyri.”

**99** Amitai-Preiss, “A Poll Tax Seal”; Robinson, “Neck-Sealing,” 404.

**100** Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 72–74.

**101** Amitai-Preiss, “A Poll Tax Seal”; Ibrahim, “Additions.”

**102** Amitai-Preiss, “Umayyad Lead Sealings.” See also the examples mentioned by Amitai-Preiss, “A Poll Tax Seal,” of seals mentioning, on one side, *khātim* (“seal”) of a district’s name and, on the other side, *iqīm* (“district”), followed by another geographical name.

**103** Amitai-Preiss, “Islamic Lead Coins,” 15–16, nrs. 10–11.

**104** Ibrahim, “Nuevos documentos.”

**105** Four such copper seals are known, dated to 93 and 95 AH (712–715 CE): Schindel, “Nochmals.”

**106** Ibrahim, “Nuevos documentos.”

**107** Amitai-Preiss, “A Poll Tax Seal.”

“the peace agreement of Elibirri”;<sup>108</sup> *muṣālaḥat arḍ jayyān*, “the peace agreement of the land of Jaen” [Figure 5.11a–b]).<sup>109</sup> Sealings discovered in southern France record booty captured from coastal towns raided by the Arabs,<sup>110</sup> and contain Arabic terms known from legal and administrative manuals. These lead sealings from al-Andalus, Egypt, Syria/Palestine, and southern France protected payments intended for the central Muslim administration. Such examples from across the empire all share an avoidance of images and decorations and reveal a common script and technical vocabulary.<sup>111</sup>

Another administrative change related to the execution of the collection of the poll tax is visible in early eighth-century sealings. As part of the administrative reforms under the Marwanids, centralizing measures were introduced to increase control over the local administrations and their executives, as well as individual taxpayers and their possessions, in order to secure a higher tax uptake. Closer supervision of taxpayers, their possessions, and their movements resulted in a higher tax burden, while the stronger state presence caused disaffection among the subjects. Protest took different forms, from tax evasion by running away from one’s place of residence to outright revolt. The Muslim authorities struck back with a measure that was as effective as it was humiliating: lead sealings fastened around the necks or wrists of non-Muslim taxpayers identified them as liable to the non-Muslim poll tax, while at the same time disgracing them by associating them with slaves and captives. Although no lead sealings that can be connected to the bodily sealing of individual taxpayers dating to the eighth century have been identified, such objects do exist, but from a later period.<sup>112</sup> Contemporary literary sources from Egypt and northern Iraq give detailed descriptions of the practice. The custom of putting lead sealings around the necks and hands of captives and slaves was, moreover, practised in the Sasanian Empire for the purpose of humiliation, punishment, and identification. The Muslims were the first in the Near East, however, to apply this debasing practice in a fiscal context. The measure was not applied continuously and generally but, rather, represented extraordinary punitive or overzealous measures, which, for logistical and moral reasons, could not be maintained in the long term.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Ibrahim, “Additions,” 116, no. 1.

<sup>109</sup> Ibrahim, “Nuevos documentos,” 153–55, no. 10, with corrections in the addenda.

<sup>110</sup> See also *maghnūm ṭayyib qusima bi-arbūna*, “licit booty distributed in Narbonne”: Marichal and Sénac, “Sceaux arabes.”

<sup>111</sup> Amitai-Preiss, “Umayyad Vocabulary.”

<sup>112</sup> Robinson, “Neck-Sealing,” 427.

<sup>113</sup> Robinson emphasizes that neck sealing, which initially served only a humiliating and stigmatizing function, from the early eighth century to the tenth served an additional, fiscal

Archaeological material from the most western part of the Muslim empire, al-Andalus, shows how the new Muslim administrative standards introduced under the Marwanids spread throughout the empire. The Arab conquerors who crossed over into the Iberian Peninsula in 711 were closely related to the Umayyads of Egypt and Syria-Palestine. They introduced the same kinds of lead sealings, recording (in Arabic) and protecting the payments made by towns and communities to the new rulers. While the specific terminology referring to payments made as part of the peace agreements (*ṣulḥ*, *muṣālaḥa*) and the status of the conquered land (*ḡay*) is not attested elsewhere, the invading armies had obviously already incorporated the linguistic and administrative changes initiated further east (Figures 5.10a–b, 5.11a–b, 5.13a–b).<sup>114</sup> Some of the vocabulary and expressions in use on these early eighth-century Arab(ic)-Islamic seals compare well with those in use elsewhere in the empire and point to a common administrative culture (Figures 5.5a–b, 5.16a–b; Plate 5.1a–b).<sup>115</sup> No clearly identifiable images appear on the Andalusian lead seals at all.<sup>116</sup>

## Global and Local Trends

The creation of one Muslim empire uniting the former Byzantine eastern Mediterranean provinces and the Sasanian Empire facilitated the sharing of practices and forms across a large area. Falling under one political system and sharing many linguistic, economic, legal, and social features meant that, transcending local specificities, local material repertoires, and administrative practices, they were distributed more widely and more rapidly than before. In this way, Sasanian and

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purpose, even though it was always secondary to the humiliation ("Neck-Sealing," 417ff.). The measure might also be connected to administrative changes aimed at strict centralized control, which were introduced early in the eighth century and led to censuses and land surveys, but which were not maintained because of logistic difficulties: Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 94–102. Extraordinary circumstances in eighth-century Middle Egypt motivated increased record-keeping of the movement of people: Delattre, "Checkpoints"; Boud'hors, "L'apport." See also the Arabic safe conducts and tax receipts that had to be shown to officials upon request: Frantz-Murphy, *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri*, 105–10.

**114** Ibrahim, "Additions," 116, no. 1; 118, no. 3; Ibrahim "Nuevos documentos," no. 14. Other terminology so far only attested in the Andalusian material is *qasm*: Ibrahim, "Additions," 121, 125–26, nos. 6–8; Figure 5.13a in this essay.

**115** See the use of *arḍ*, "land," with a provincial or place name, which appears on lead seals from al-Andalus and Syria-Palestine (Ibrahim, "Nuevos documentos"; Amitai-Preiss, "Arḍ and Jund," 134–41) and which is also a frequently attested term in papyri from administrative and fiscal contexts: Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*. The reference on seals from al-Andalus and Egypt to payments made by the inhabitants (*ahl*) of the province mirrors the use of that term in the papyri to refer to the taxpaying subjects (*ahl al-arḍ*), and might be compared to the identification "Jews" (*yahūd*) on a sealing from Tiberias.

**116** Ibrahim, "Nuevos documentos."

Byzantine shapes, structures, and procedures extended more easily beyond their respective imperial borders. The newly introduced forms and practices also underwent adjustments as they were put to local use and fitted to local needs. Seals bear witness to this active process of adjustment, reshaping, and expansion, which resulted in a shared but locally defined administrative material culture.<sup>117</sup>

In their form and application, Arab(ic)-Islamic seals show an influx of Near Eastern influences that were given new meaning and functions in the Muslim empire and implemented locally. The introduction of the common practice in the Sasanian Empire of adding a lead seal to the neck or hands of captives and slaves, also occasionally performed in the Byzantine Empire, was given a new function and application in the Muslim empire. Significantly, the Muslims were the first to use identifying lead neck-seals in a fiscal context; in doing so, they adjusted a Sasanian practice and implemented it throughout the Muslim empire.<sup>118</sup> Decorative elements such as stars and crescents, frequently encountered on Sasanian seals, found their way onto the seals of the Egyptian governor Qurra b. Sharik (in office 709–715), where they appear together with the animal figures commonly used on Byzantine seals (Figure 5.9b).<sup>119</sup> Stars are also used on early eighth-century seals and coins in al-Andalus and Palestine.<sup>120</sup> In eighth-century Khurasani documents star-covered clay sealings finalize the transaction (Figures 5.14a–b, 5.15a–b). An increased presence of one-sided sealings, in clay and lead, might also point to the influence of Sasanian sealing practice (which exclusively used one-sided seals, as opposed to the double-sided ones commonly used in the Byzantine Empire) upon the whole Muslim empire (Figure 5.12).<sup>121</sup> The Byzantine use of lead seal imprints arrived in al-Andalus with the Arab conquerors, who spread this practice westwards.<sup>122</sup>

Other administrative practices and measures newly introduced by the Muslims found their ways onto the seals in different parts of the empire. *Arḍ*, “land,” is used in papyri from Egypt, as well as on sealings from al-Andalus and Palestine, with the technical meaning of land under the control of Muslims and subject to taxation. Another technical term related to taxes is *ahl*, “people,” attested on papyri and

**117** For a similar pattern of sharing of Byzantine and Sasanian forms to the development of an Islamic form with local expressions in the domain of material culture, see Grabar, *Formation of Islamic Art*. See also Knappett “Imprints.”

**118** Robinson, “Neck-Sealing,” 405.

**119** Sijpesteijn, “Seals and Papyri,” 173. The introduction of stars on seals does not have to be related to eastern practice, as evidenced in eighth-century Khurasani documents: Khan, *Arabic Documents*, 87–88.

**120** Ibrahim, “Nuevos documentos”; Amitai-Preiss, “Four Umayyad Seals,” no. 2.

**121** Amitai-Preiss and Farhi, “A Small Assemblage,” no. 1.

**122** See above, note 63, for the distribution of glass, lead, and bronze weights throughout the different provinces of the Islamic empire.



sealings from al-Andalus, Syria-Palestine, and Egypt to designate the taxpaying subjects in lands conquered by the Arabs. Other examples include the term *ṣulḥ*, “amicable treaty,” which appears on sealings from al-Andalus and southern France recording tribute payments and booty. Local practices thrived as well, with many of the forms, expressions, and technical terms found on seals being specific to a particular province or district. Uniformity was imposed from the Marwanid court at the beginning of the eighth century, with Arabic-only seals becoming dominant, albeit not exclusive everywhere. Administrative hierarchies became settled and were represented uniformly and consistently even if this was initially most visible at the level of single provinces.<sup>123</sup> Regional differences continued to exist, with local political powers and customs maintaining an influence.

In the ninth century population movements from the eastern part of the Muslim empire to the west introduced new administrative terminologies and practices from the eastern provinces westwards. Armies and government officials were sent from Baghdad to subdue Egypt, bringing it (temporarily) back under the wings of the Abbasid caliphate. The diminishing economic situation in Baghdad, moreover, drew civil servants westwards to the more prosperous Egyptian capital. These administrators introduced practices from the eastern part of the empire to Egypt and Syria-Palestine, which generally fell under Egyptian influence, or even outright political control, at this time.<sup>124</sup>

The application of multiple imprints of the same seal on one piece of clay was introduced into Egypt at this time. For example, the *jahbadh* (paymaster) Yalahwayh imprinted his seal twice at the bottom of a document dated 291 (904) as proof that he had received the taxes mentioned in the papyrus (Figure 5.8c).<sup>125</sup> This practice can be connected to similar practices common in legal documents from the eastern part of the Muslim empire. The custom of applying multiple seals to one lump of clay had been practised by Sasanian legal officials.<sup>126</sup> Their placement and size indicated the hierarchy of the parties involved. Sometimes multiple imprints were impressed by the same seal belonging to the main official present.<sup>127</sup> A similar development can be observed in Ptolemaic Egypt, where the use of multiple seals on one piece of clay had been replaced by the practice of printing the seal of one official on clay and the signatures of additional witnesses surrounding it.<sup>128</sup> Arabic legal documents from mid-eighth-century Khurasan have large seals with multiple

<sup>123</sup> Amitai-Preiss, “Umayyad Vocabulary” and “Kūra and Iqlīm.”

<sup>124</sup> Khan, *Arabic Documents*, 83, and “The Pre-Islamic Background.”

<sup>125</sup> Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 38, no. 29.

<sup>126</sup> Macuch, “The Use of Seals.”

<sup>127</sup> Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 63.

<sup>128</sup> Vandonpe, “Seals in and on the Papyri,” 234.

imprints from seals and thumbnail marks belonging to the witnesses to the transaction (Figure 5.14b).<sup>129</sup> In its move westwards, the practice of applying multiple seals to one lump of clay thus shifted to the documentary domain, appearing in Egypt on administrative rather than legal documents. Although no clay sealings appear on legal deeds, the eastern practice of witnesses adding their personal seal to their name might have impacted the practice of witnesses using a personalized written sign (*'alāma*) behind their name, which becomes commonly practised in Arabic papyri from the ninth century onwards.<sup>130</sup>

The introduction of paper as a writing material profoundly changed the writing culture in the Middle East.<sup>131</sup> Introduced from China via Central Asia, the production of paper was much cheaper than that of parchment, leather, or papyrus. Fabricated from used textiles, paper could be produced everywhere and anywhere. The introduction of this writing support was accompanied by other practices. One such related innovation was the use of ink-stamped seals, which led to innovations in seals and signet rings as well. The first paper mills appeared in Baghdad in the eighth century, and paper reached Egypt by the ninth century, becoming dominant by the tenth. Clay seal imprints can be found on paper documents from the tenth century, but by the eleventh century ink stamps had replaced clay sealings.<sup>132</sup>

## Conclusion

The use and format of sealings in Syria-Palestine and Egypt show an interesting and revealing blend of continuities and changes under the Muslims. With seals and seal imprints dating from directly after the conquest of these areas, the employment and appearance of seals can be connected to practices introduced by the new rulers as well as subsequent changes taking place under a developing and changing Muslim state.

The meaning and function of seals as a means for identification and authority, on the one hand, and closure and protection, on the other, persisted throughout this period. How these functions were expressed, what materials were used, how the seals were applied to objects, and what they looked like differed depending on local conditions and governmental measures, at both the regional and central levels. Practical considerations, such as the degree of interaction between scribal and administrative cultures before and after the conquests and the level of interaction between subjects and rulers as a result of settlement patterns, played a role. Symbolic

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**129** Khan, *Arabic Documents*, 83. The use of fingerprints in clay seals is known from Ptolemaic Egypt (Vandorpe, "Seals in and on the Papyri," 236) and from the ancient Near East: Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 105.

**130** Sijpesteijn, "Seals and Papyri."

**131** Bloom, *Paper before Print*.

**132** Grohmann, *Einführung*, 129.

considerations, such as the contacts (hostile, diplomatic, and economic) with the Byzantine Empire and the relation between Muslim and non-Muslim populations, as well as processes of Arabicization and Islamicization, were also important.<sup>133</sup> Finally, political relations between the provinces and the centre of the caliphate, as well as the dynamics of multicentrism, imperial ambition, and the formation of an Islamic empire, also impacted the way the Muslims expressed their rule and ideology in administrative measures, building projects, and material artefacts such as seals.

The exclusive use of the Arabic language by the administration was one example of this. Even taking into account accidents of preservation, a pattern of change disseminating from the political centre to the periphery with faster implementation in the public domain, in which central control was greater, is visible in the material record. The oldest protocol papyrus that includes Arabic is dated to the caliphate of Mu'āwīya (r. 661–680), and it was used in Nessana, Palestine.<sup>134</sup> In Egypt, located further from the centre, the earliest bilingual Arabic/Greek protocols date to the caliphate of al-Walīd (r. 705–715).<sup>135</sup> Arabic, though present from the beginning of Muslim rule, did not monopolize the chancery (*dīwān*), with local languages being actively promoted for at least a century following 'Abd al-Malik's decree ordering the exclusive use of Arabic. The oldest known Arabic lead weight was struck in Palestine with 'Abd al-Malik's name and additional Arabic legends on it, and a contemporary bronze weight belonging to 'Abd al-Malik's governor in Iraq, al-Ḥajjāj (d. 714), has Arabic struck over an original Greek legend.<sup>136</sup> Arabic sealings mentioning the name and title of Caliph 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705), his sons and Caliphs al-Walīd (r. 705–715), Sulaymān (r. 715–717), and Hishām (r. 724–743), as well as Caliph Marwān II (r. 744–750), are found in Syria-Palestine.<sup>137</sup> Sealings with Arabic start to be used for institutions and administrative domains particular to Muslim rule, such as the poll tax or tribute payments by communities of non-Muslims and the division of booty gained in raiding from the 710s onwards. The use of local languages and the continued use of figures—rather than writing—on seals, even on those belonging to government officials, continues into the eighth century in Egypt, Iran, and Khurasan. In Armenia no Arabic seals have been found before the ninth century.<sup>138</sup> On the other hand, no administrative seals with depictions are known from al-Andalus or Syria-Palestine. Syria-Palestine, being at the centre of the Umayyad Empire, was where

**133** See also the exoticizing motive at play in the application of Islamic motifs on ninth- and tenth-century Byzantine seals: Walker, "Islamicizing Motifs."

**134** Kraemer, *Excavations at Nessana*, no. 60, but see above at note 81.

**135** Grohmann, *Protokolle*.

**136** Khamis, "A Bronze Weight."

**137** Amitai-Preiss, "Four Umayyad Lead Sealings," 176.

**138** Ninth-century layers in Dvin yielded Arabic seals: Huff, "Technological Observations," 376.

policy changes, including the change to Arabic, were first implemented. While distance thus played a role, the production of seals used by provincial officials was not subject to central control and scrutiny the way that seals for public use were.<sup>139</sup> Individual governors or governments especially closely connected to the caliphal court, such as Qurra in Egypt, al-Ḥajjāj in Iraq, or even the Umayyad conquerors of al-Andalus, implemented administrative customs more readily.

Separate traditions continued to exist on both sides of cultural-political borders. In Anatolia and Syria—the areas that the Byzantines recaptured from the Muslims in the eleventh and twelfth centuries—Arabic-speaking Christians were drawn into the Byzantine administration. Their seals in Arabic, often in combination with Syriac and Greek, and bearing prominent Christian symbols such as crosses and figures of saints, are preserved in the dozens. No such imagery is attested on administrative seals of the area under earlier Muslim rule.<sup>140</sup> Christian-Arab officials did of course work in substantial numbers in the Muslim administration, and their seals mentioning their names in Arabic have been preserved in Egypt (Figures 5.2b, 5.8c).<sup>141</sup> Conversely, only a very small number of bilingual Arabic/Greek Byzantine seals are attested from the earlier period belonging to Arabs working in the Byzantine administration, while Islamicizing motifs found their way onto some Byzantine seals of the ninth and tenth centuries.<sup>142</sup> Byzantine lead sealings for documents continued to be imprinted on both sides and identified the officials mentioned on them by their titles, contrary to the practices in Arab(ic)-Islamic seals as described above.

As opposed to public inscriptions, protocol texts, or coins, which serve a long-term function transcending temporal and confined spaces, seals serve immediate and localized needs while still operating in the public sphere and participating in the large-scale administrative and political processes of the time. These Arabic/Greek Christian Byzantine seals show how malleable and flexible the medium was, and how scribal and administrative habits, cultural and religious preferences, languages and applications were mixed, rejected, or revived in the service of new masters in new historical realities.

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**139** Compare the much slower introduction of Arabic-only legends on Umayyad copper coins, which were locally produced beyond central supervision, as opposed to silver and gold coins, the minting of which was centrally controlled. I would like to thank Kees Uitenbroek for pointing this out to me.

**140** A small number of Byzantine seals containing Arabic, and in some cases images of animals or Christian symbols, date to the seventh/eighth centuries: Heidemann and Sode, “Metallsiegel,” 48, and “Christlich-orientalische Bleisiegel,” nos. 1, 2, 3. An Arabic seal bearing a saint’s depiction on one side and an Arabic legend on the other belonged to a Byzantine family in the service of the Seljuks in Asia Minor: Heidemann and Sode, “Metallsiegel,” 48.

**141** See, for example, Antūna ibn Karīl, whose seal appears on a document dated 862: Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 38, no. 30.

**142** Walker, “Islamicizing Motifs.”

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**Abstract** This article explores the usage, imagery, and linguistic expressions found on seals produced in the early Muslim empire and reveals how these developed from the seventh century to the ninth. Comparing Islamic and pre-Islamic samples exposes continuities and changes in sealing practices among Byzantine, Sasanian, and Arabian cultures and shows how these developments can be linked to the underlying ideologies and ambitions of Muslim authorities. In particular, it explains how and why different practices unfolded in Egypt and the Levant, and compares this phenomenon to the dissemination of shared forms throughout the Muslim empire, with particular reference to the rich material from Khurasan in the east and al-Andalus in the west.

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**Keywords** Islam, Arabic, administration, taxes, Islamicization, Levant, Egypt, Iberia, Khurasan, al-Andalus

# THE FORMULATION OF URBAN IDENTITY ON BYZANTINE SEALS

CLAUDIA SODE

THE WORLD OF the ancient Mediterranean was characterized, over centuries, by a large number of cities with a high degree of autonomy. In late antiquity, however, the typical Greco-Roman *polis* experienced a constant decline, and, under the influence of invasion by other ethnic groups, in particular with the Slavic migration into the Balkans and conflicts with Persians and Arabs, most cities changed from *poleis* to being *kastra* (fortified inhabited sites). By the middle of the seventh century the eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire was extensively de-urbanized. Besides Constantinople, only a few cities (such as Thessaloniki, Ephesus, and Trebizond) were able to preserve traditional urban characteristics. This development resulted in fundamental changes to cities' administrative, economic, and social structures.<sup>1</sup>

From the tenth century on, however, cities gradually took on economic and cultural functions again. A self-confident aristocracy formed in these cities, playing an influential part in local politics and stimulating economic development by engaging in commercial production and trade (as has been shown for Rhaidestos, Thebes, and Monemvasia, among others).<sup>2</sup> In addition, members of the cities' upper classes increasingly concerned themselves with the social and cultural interests of the society. Religious lay brotherhoods, which formed in the middle of the eleventh century, not only administered religious cults and organized processions but—more importantly—provided reciprocal care. They also performed the commemoration

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My interest in the contribution of seals to our understanding of identity in Byzantium dates back to 2011, when I was asked to give a paper on this subject at the Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Colloquium "The Byzantine Self" (March 18–19, 2011), convened by Stratis Papaioannou and Maria Mavroudi. The present study highlights some preliminary conclusions with regard to urban identity in Byzantium. A comprehensive survey of this subject is yet to be undertaken. My thanks are due to Thomas Ford for translating the main body of my German text into English. Two anonymous reviewers provided helpful comments on an earlier draft of the manuscript.

**1** The transformation from *polis* to *kastron* was far more complex than outlined here: see Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 92–124 and the addendum to the revised edition of 1997, 459–61, and "The Idea of the Town"; Brandes, "Byzantine Cities"; Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall*; Wickham, *Framing the Middle Ages*, 591–692; Zavagno, *Cities in Transition*; and Magdalino, "Sixty Years of Research."

**2** See Matschke, "Selbstverständnis," 171–79; Bouras, "Aspects of the Byzantine City"; Neville, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society*; Saradi, "The Byzantine Cities"; and, most recently, Haldon, "Die byzantinische Stadt."

of the dead, thereby making the increasing socio-economic stratification of the city visible (as in the well-documented case of Thebes).<sup>3</sup>

Yet, in contrast to western Europe—where, after the turn of the second millennium, some cities attained substantial military and economic strength and, in the form of communes, eventually achieved legal and administrative independence<sup>4</sup>—Byzantine cities never developed into similarly independent self-governing communities or city states. Although some cities (such as Larissa, Amaseia, Adrianople, and Thessaloniki) created their own legal customs and elements of a civic organization, ranging from civic institutions with designated responsibilities to peoples' assemblies and councils, which are assumed to have acted alongside the state representatives,<sup>5</sup> this does not indicate that these cities reached any real civic autonomy. It is important to establish, however, that Byzantine cities and their inhabitants did develop a distinctive civic culture and, to some extent, a civic consciousness, based upon growing economic and military power and the existence of local cults. The fact that cities were often referred to in terms that denoted their inhabitants as a collective unit arguably suggests the existence of a sense of community.<sup>6</sup> Seals, in particular, display this corporate terminology. For example, a twelfth-century seal of the Metropolitan Constantine of Thessaloniki bears an image of the city's patron, St. Demetrios, and (on the reverse) the metrical inscription Σφραγὶς προέδρου Θεσσαλῶν Κωνσταντίνου: "Seal of Constantine, *proedros* [metropolitan] of the Thessalians"—that is, of the people of Thessaloniki, and, by extension, the city itself (Figure 6.1).<sup>7</sup> At the same time, individuals inserted urban or regional toponyms in the formulation of their identities. With the widespread use of family names from the ninth century onwards, these made their appearance on seals as well.<sup>8</sup>

Historical works, chronicles, lives of saints, letters, and documents, as well as miscellaneous administrative and legal texts, provide important information about

**3** See Nesbitt and Wiita, "A Confraternity." Günter Prinzing has recently brought another confraternity to light: "Spuren einer religiösen Bruderschaft."

**4** On this Western urban phenomenon, see, for example, Heers, *La ville au Moyen Age*; and Boucheron and Menjot, *La ville médiévale*.

**5** See Matschke, "Selbstverständnis," 181–84 (Larissa, Amaseia), and 188–89 (Thessaloniki); Angold, "The Shaping of the Medieval Byzantine City," 21; and, most recently, Kontogiannopoulou, *Τοπικά Συμβούλια στις Βυζαντινές πόλεις*.

**6** See Angold, "The Shaping of a Medieval Byzantine City," 20, 57; and Matschke, "Grundzüge," 57, and "Selbstverständnis," 180.

**7** Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals*, vol. 1, 78–79, no. 18.81b: DO 55.1.5030; no. 18.81a: Fogg 2016. See Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, 236, nos. 428a–b, for two additional seals from the same boulloterion.

**8** See Cheynet, "Aristocratic Anthroponymy." See also Stavrakos, *Die byzantinischen Bleisiegel*, nos. 12, 115, 220, 240.

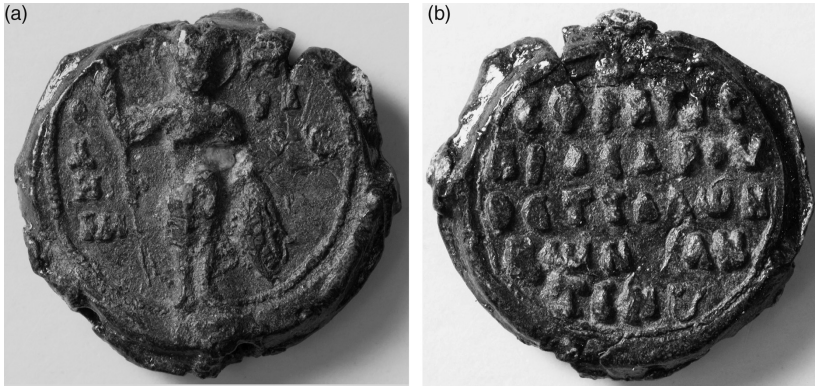


Figure 6.1. Seal of Constantine, *proedros* (Metropolitan) of Thessaloniki, twelfth century. Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington DC (DO 55.1.5030).

political and military history, financial and tax policy, administrative structures, and the internal development of individual cities, and thus enable a better understanding of the distinct character of the Byzantine city. The formation of a distinctive civic identity remains crucial for a city, however. Yet, with the exception of the capital, Constantinople, whose specific political and cultural self-identity is undisputed, and Thessaloniki, the second city of the empire,<sup>9</sup> the collective identity of other Byzantine cities has been widely neglected by prior research. Indeed, scholars have repeatedly questioned whether any urban self-conception or a civic identity existed at all in Byzantium.<sup>10</sup> This is, in part, due to the authors of literary and historical texts, who belonged predominantly to the literary elite of the empire and conveyed, first and foremost (apart from isolated remarks in letters, sermons, or autobiographical writings),<sup>11</sup> a self-conception typical of the capital, not of that of the provincial cities in which they lived.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Fenster, *Laudes Constantinopolitanae*; Kaltsogianni, Kotzabassi, and Paraskeuopoulou, *Η Θεσσαλονίκη*.

<sup>10</sup> See Matschke, "Selbstverständnis," 160.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, the letters and sermons of John Mauropous, Metropolitan of Euchaita in the Pontus region (eleventh century): Lagarde, *Iohannis Euchaitorum Metropolitae quae in Codice Vaticano 676 supersunt*, 135–36, no. 80; 160–65, no. 184; 207–9, no. 189. See also Angold, "The Shaping of a Medieval Byzantine City," 12. For authors referencing the city of Thessaloniki, see Kaltsogianni, Kotzabassi, and Paraskeuopoulou, *Η Θεσσαλονίκη*. On autobiographical texts in Byzantium, see Hinterberger, *Autobiographische Traditionen*.

<sup>12</sup> See Matschke, "Selbstverständnis," 161–63.

By contrast, Byzantine lead seals, which have long been marginalized by researchers, offer much more direct and genuine access to the phenomenon of civic identity in Byzantium. These contain various kinds of information: images (mostly of the Virgin and of saints; occasionally also secular motifs), as well as inscriptions, which give the name, title, and office of the respective seal owner.<sup>13</sup> Byzantine lead seals thus bring to our attention a large number of individuals not attested in other sources, but they also pass down revealing details of their social, cultural, and political backgrounds. The frequently quoted number of surviving seals, 80,000, is not likely to be exaggerated; and the number of publications devoted to Byzantine lead seals, in the form of collection catalogues and essays, has risen markedly in recent decades. A large portion of the surviving Byzantine seals have still not been catalogued, however, or are known only through short descriptions in auction catalogues. In addition, new seals come to light every year during archaeological excavations.<sup>14</sup>

The images inscribed on seals were much more than mere decoration; they were a medium to convey identity with reference to a specific iconographic vocabulary. Quite a number of sigillographic studies have investigated the motivations that stimulated an individual's choice of iconography, such as homonymity, gender, family devotions, or official administrative positions.<sup>15</sup>

But whereas expressions of personal identity on seals have been studied, to some extent, the phenomenon of corporate identity in Byzantium still needs much further research. This research would illuminate membership in administrative and military units, church organizations, monastic communities, and, above all, the importance of corporate civic identities.<sup>16</sup>

From the twelfth century, at the latest, many urban communities in western Europe designed and used a corporate seal to certify that they functioned as

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**13** On Byzantine sigillography, see, in general, Nesbitt, "Sigillography"; and Cheynet, "Introduction à la sigillographie byzantine."

**14** For a complete index of all seals published recently in scholarly papers and auction catalogues, see the series *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography*. For modern catalogues of museum and private collections, see the articles cited in the previous footnote.

**15** See especially Cotsonis, "Onomastics, Gender, Office and Images," and "Contribution of Byzantine Lead Seals." See also Cheynet and Morrisson, "Texte et image." Alicia Walker has recently dealt with Islamicizing stylistic and iconographic features on ninth- to eleventh-century Byzantine lead seals as a means of expressing one's personal identity: "Islamicizing Motifs."

**16** Corporate seals have been intensively researched in studies of western Europe: see Späth, "Die Bildlichkeit korporativer Siegel," and "The Body and Its Parts"; and Groten, "Vom Bild zum Zeichen."

institutions with full legal and executive capacities. City seals show stylized architectural depictions of walls, gates, and churches—frequently those associated with the city's patron saint. Numerous studies have been dedicated to the semantic operations of these seals, as well as to the question raised by the ways in which these images were able to represent civic communities as seal-bearing institutions.<sup>17</sup> As noted above, cities in the Byzantine Empire never developed into autonomous city states. Consequently, such depictions are absent from Byzantine seals, and city seals proper were never issued in Byzantium. A few specimens, all dating back to the early Byzantine era, may allude to πόλεις (or urban communities) as corporate institutions. It is unclear, however, who exactly issued these seals, for which purposes they were used, and what the significance of their imagery and legends may have been. It has also been suggested that such seals may have belonged to ecclesiastical, rather than to civic, institutions. The first example in this small corpus is a seventh-century seal of the *koinon* (community) of Sinope on the Black Sea: τὸ κοινὸν πόλεως Σινόπης (Figure 6.2).<sup>18</sup>

Another specimen, also from the seventh century, is the seal of the *koinon* of the Dekapolis of Isauria in South Asia Minor,<sup>19</sup> an administrative district consisting of ten towns, with the capital at Germanikoupolis (Ermenek) (Figure 6.3).<sup>20</sup> Finally, there is a seal of Apameia and Antioch (Theoupolis), in the historical region of Syria, which may have belonged to an official who administered the two cities.<sup>21</sup>

**17** See, among others, Diederich, *Rheinische Städtiesiegel* and "Zum Quellenwert und Bedeutungsgehalt"; and Bedos-Rezak, *Corpus des sceaux*, and "Towns and Seals," as well as *When Ego was Imago*, 231–52. See also Solway, ed., *Medieval Coins and Seals*, especially the chapters of Cherry ("Seals of Cities and Towns"), New ("The Common Seal"), McEwan ("The Formation"); and Späth ("Art"); Drös and Jakobs, "Die Zeichen einer neuen Klasse"; and Späth, "Zeichen bürgerschaftlicher Repräsentation."

**18** Laurent, *Le corpus*, no. 423 (cf. W. Seibt's review in *Byzantinoslavica* 35 [1974]: 78). For a parallel specimen, see Zacos and Veglery, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, no. 2890 (DO 47.2.160), also in the addenda to Nesbitt and Oikonomides, eds., *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals*, vol. 5, 147, no. 110.1. Some of these scholars consider the possibility that the seal may have belonged to the church (or a religious institution) of Sinope (Laurent, Oikonomides, and Nesbitt). Jean-Claude Cheynet, in his commentary on the seal of the *koinon* of Dekapolis (see below), puts forward the opinion that both seals belonged to a civic institution.

**19** Zacos and Veglery, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, no. 1173 (erroneously read as "Leon archon of Dekapolis"); re-edited by Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals*, vol. 5, 19, no. 7.1. There are two parallel specimens: Cheynet, *Sceaux de la collection Zacos*, no. 25; and Münzhandlung Herbert Grün, Auktion 11, no. 546.17 (=Münz Zentrum, Sale 80, 28-30 November 1994, no. 714, cf. SBS 6, 152). According to Cheynet, another seal with the same inscription, but arranged differently, is in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (no. 2929).

**20** See Hild and Hellenkemper, *Kilikien und Isaurien*, 235–36; and Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals*, vol. 5, 19.

**21** Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals*, vol. 5, 32, no. 9.19.



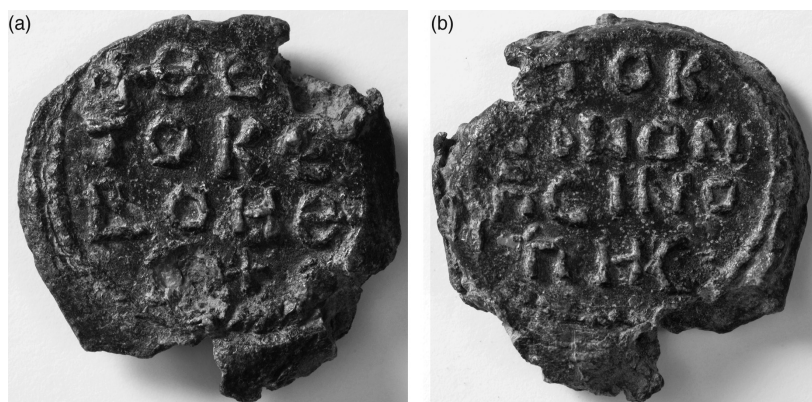


Figure 6.2. Seal of the *koinon* of Sinope, seventh century. Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington DC (DO 47.2.160).



Figure 6.3. Seal of the *koinon* of the Dekapolis of Isauria, seventh century. Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington DC (DO 55.1.2468).

Once again, it is difficult to say whether this seal, which dates to the sixth or seventh century, refers to a civic or ecclesiastical unit (Figure 6.4).

In contrast to these examples, there are various personal seals of a much later date that, on close examination, express a feeling of belonging to one's city, displaying clues that have gone unnoticed in previous research. A surviving example from the tenth century is the seal of one John, *protospatharios* and *strategos* (governing general) of Cherson (today Sevastopol in the Crimea). The obverse of this seal shows an unusual image: a two-winged city gate between two towers. Above the gate, a dome with a cross may perhaps depict a church. This image probably represents one of the main gates within the defensive wall of the



Figure 6.4. Seal of Apameia and Antioch, sixth to seventh centuries. Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington DC (DO 77.34.81).

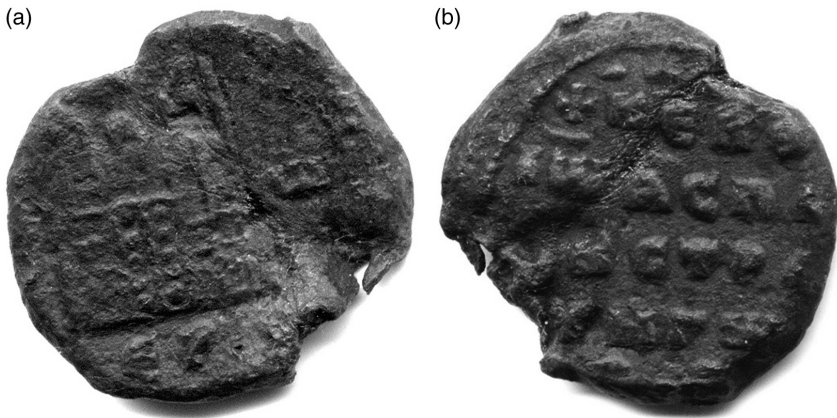


Figure 6.5. Seal of John, *protospatharios* and *strategos* of Cherson, tenth century. The Sheremetiev's Family Museum of Historical and Cultural Rarities, Kiev.

city, which was widely known to contemporaries and possibly stood in connection with a local cult (Figure 6.5).<sup>22</sup>

Another example is the seal of John Komnenos Dukas, emperor of Thessaloniki (1237–1242) and despot of Epiros (1242–1244) (Figure 6.6).<sup>23</sup> To the left, on

<sup>22</sup> Alekseenko, “Korsun’skie vrata.” See also Angar and Sode, “Architekturdarstellungen,” 36–37.

<sup>23</sup> Zacos and Vegler, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, no. 115; Oikonomides, *A Collection*, no. 132. See also Angar and Sode, “Architekturdarstellungen,” 40–41. On John Komnenos Doukas, see Varzos, *Η γενεαλογία των Κομνηνών*.

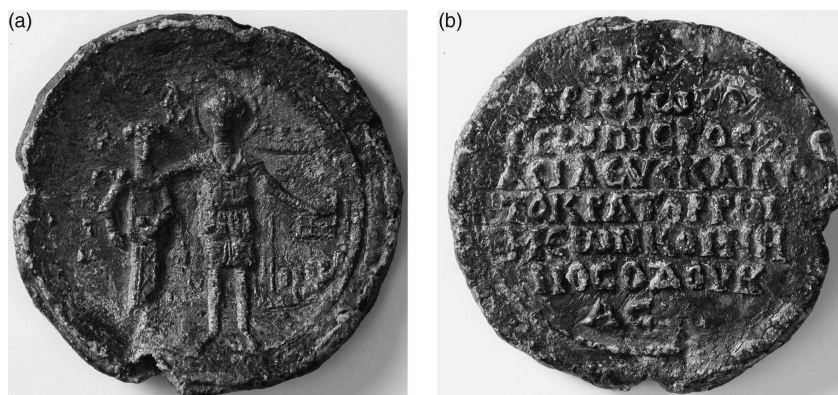


Figure 6.6. Seal of John Komnenos Dukas, 1240–1242. Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington DC (DO 55.1.4356).

the obverse, one can see John himself, standing beside the larger image of St. Demetrios, patron saint of Thessaloniki. On the right, in the background, is the city wall of Thessaloniki, with battlements. The saint has put his right hand on the right shoulder of the ruler in a way that conveys protection as well as legitimacy. The saint's outstretched left hand points to a structure, probably the saint's shrine, which was situated inside the city.<sup>24</sup> The iconography is reminiscent of a well-known seventh-century mosaic in the Church of St. Demetrios, in which the city's patron saint appears with his arms around a bishop and a lay donor, positioned on either side of him. In the background of this mosaic there is also a city wall with battlements, representing Thessaloniki.<sup>25</sup>

On both of these seals, the city is portrayed through its characteristic outer walls and with a structure that may represent a religious building. Urban architectural elements have been turned into symbols of self-identification, allowing the owner of the seal to express his attachment to his city. Similarly, an eleventh-century seal of Michael, bishop of Charioupolis (Thrace), shows on the obverse a building pierced with arched windows and covered with a dome raised from a drum and topped with a cross; this building has been identified as the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (Figure 6.7). That Michael did not choose a saint for his

<sup>24</sup> See [www.doaks.org/resources/seals/gods-regents-on-earth-a-thousand-years-of-byzantine-imperial-seals/rulers-of-byzantium/john-komnenos-doukas-1240-42](http://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/gods-regents-on-earth-a-thousand-years-of-byzantine-imperial-seals/rulers-of-byzantium/john-komnenos-doukas-1240-42) (Jonathan Shea). George Zacos and Alexander Vegler take the structure for a rectangular shield; Nicolas Oikonomides suggests that it could be one of the gates of Thessaloniki.

<sup>25</sup> See Bakirtzis, Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou, and Mavropoulou-Tsioumi, *Mosaics of Thessaloniki*, 169–70, figs. 47–48.



Figure 6.7. Seal of Michael, bishop of Charioupolis, eleventh century. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des médailles, Collection Seyrig, no. 292. Photo: Jean-Claude Cheynet.

seal, as was usually the case among Byzantine bishops (as we saw above), but, rather, the edifice of Hagia Sophia suggests that he had been a cleric there before his enthronement as bishop of Charioupolis. He clearly considered this earlier circumstance so significant that he referred to it by means of a miniature illustration of the cathedral church.<sup>26</sup> In this case, the depiction of the church can perhaps be related to a group of seals, ranging in date from the eleventh century through the fourteenth, which belonged to the *ekdikoi* (or *ekklesiekdikoi*), a tribunal (*ekdikeion*) of priests assigned to Hagia Sophia by emperor Justinian I. These seals depict the standing figures of the Virgin and of Justinian, who both support a model of Hagia Sophia covered with a disproportionately large dome. Michael is likely to have encountered these seals during his time at the Hagia Sophia, when he may have held the office of an *ekdikos*.<sup>27</sup> Nothing is known about the patron saint of Charioupolis, and not much about the city's churches and monuments either.<sup>28</sup> One may entertain the notion, however, that the central church in Charioupolis was also dedicated to Hagia Sophia, as was the case in other cities (such as Saint Sophia of Kiev), and even speculate that Michael may have chosen to represent an urban architectural feature on his seal.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Laurent, *Le corpus*, vol. 1, no. 335; Cheynet, Morrisson, and Seibt, *Les sceaux*, no. 239. See also Angar and Sode, "Architekturdarstellungen," 37–38. For a similar seal of the same owner, see Wassiliou-Seibt and Seibt, *Der byzantinische Mensch*, 78–79, no. 53.

<sup>27</sup> For the seals of the *ekdikoi*, see Boutyrsky, "The Seals of the Great Church"; Cotsonis, "The Virgin and Justinian"; and Prinzing, "Das Bild Justinians I.," 16–17.

<sup>28</sup> For Charioupolis, see Külzer, *Ostthrakien*, 308–10.

<sup>29</sup> I am indebted to Olga Karagiorgou for pointing this out to me.



Every city in Byzantium was tied into a wide range of ideological, religious, and administrative institutions. Civic identity was often associated with a church, a monastic foundation, or a saint to whom a particular church was consecrated. Thus, bishops and metropolitans often included the patron of their see on their seals (with certain exceptions, as noted above). Accordingly, the archbishops of Thessaloniki would choose to display St. Demetrios on their seals, as can be seen on the seal of Constantine, the Metropolitan of Thessaloniki (Figure 6.1). Consequently, depictions of saints on seals may refer to important local cult traditions,<sup>30</sup> which were crucial for the formation of civic identity. Images of local saints therefore highlight the bond of the seal's owner (who may also represent a larger community, such as a church or a monastery) with a particular site. As we have seen, civic identity was also articulated through reference to a city's particular sights and architectural features: walls, gates, towers, churches, sacred places, and the saints connected with them.<sup>31</sup> Concurrent with this trend in the iconography of Byzantine seals, we can detect that citizens increasingly show pride in important buildings, albeit to varying degrees and in various places. The inhabitants of the city of Sparta/Lacedaemon in the Peloponnese, for example, are said to have erected a church on the old city's agora towards the end of the tenth century, at the prompting of St. Nikon the Metanoite. In this context, it is important to note that the hagiographer, in his life of the saint, equated the deeds of the builders and craftsmen with those of Phidias and other famous artists of antiquity. Similarly, the reported donation of two ancient pillars for the construction of the church, by two city archons, may be read as a way of expressing consciousness of long-standing historical traditions and civic self-esteem.<sup>32</sup>

Civic identity could also be expressed in words. The noted rhetor Michael Italikos, who was Metropolitan of Philippoupolis (Plovdiv, Bulgaria) from 1143 to 1157,<sup>33</sup> used his seal to address the personified city in two twelve-syllable verses, extending over both sides of the seal. He hailed it as "City of Philip, the creature of

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**30** See especially Cotsonis, "Saints and Cult Centers," and "The Contribution."

**31** Architectural depictions on seals can possibly be related to a renewed interest in the iconography of architecture and microarchitecture in middle and late Byzantine art more generally: see Angar, "Stiftermodelle in Byzanz"; and Ćurčić and Hadjistryphonos, *Architecture as Icon*.

**32** See Sullivan, *The Life of Saint Nikon*, chap. 38. I owe this reference to Matschke, "Selbstverständnis," 166n38; and Angold, "The Shaping," 16–17.

**33** Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals*, vol. 1, 152–53, no. 68.2. On this seal, see also Wassiliou-Seibt, *Corpus*, vol. 2, no. 1807. On an earlier occasion, the same author reversed the correct order of the two verses: *Corpus*, vol. 1, no. 832; see Karagiorgou, "Apropos of a Corpus," 267–68. Many thanks to Olga Karagiorgou for drawing my attention to this discussion.

the apostles [i.e., Philip the deacon, known from the Acts of Apostles],” and tells the city that he is providing spiritual food to its (the city’s) flock: that is, the citizens. This is another example that attests to a certain degree of civic pride and, consequently, of civic identity.

In contrast to what has often been assumed, then, Byzantine lead seals from the tenth century onwards offer evidence for the existence of some cities’ distinct self-confidence and a sense of well-developed civic identity among their inhabitants. In addition to textual evidence, seals thus deserve to be considered more carefully as invaluable witnesses to the ways in which cities and collective identity were understood in Byzantine culture.

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**Abstract** In western Europe, from the twelfth century at the latest, many urban communities designed and used corporate seals to prove that they functioned as institutions with full legal and executive capacities. In contrast, Byzantine cities never developed into similarly independent self-governing communities or city states and, consequently, never used city seals. There are indications, however, that, from the tenth century on, Byzantine cities developed a distinctive civic culture and, to some extent, a civic consciousness based upon growing economic and military power and the existence of local cults. The article presents various seals used by individuals, which express a feeling of belonging to one's city—clues that have gone unnoticed in previous research. It is concluded that seals, with their rich iconographic, historical, and philological information, deserve to be considered more carefully as invaluable witnesses to the ways in which cities and collective urban identity were understood in Byzantine culture.

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**Keywords** identity, Byzantium, cities, Byzantine churches, urban history, medieval history



# THE CLOTH SEAL: A MARK OF QUALITY, IDENTIFICATION, OR TAXATION?

JOHN CHERRY

SIGNS INDICATING POSSESSION have been, and continue to be, stamped, impressed, engraved, or branded on animals, houses, and objects.<sup>1</sup> As manufacture and trade developed in the Middle Ages, marks were applied to objects to indicate their source, quality, and the fact that their purveyors or importers had paid duty or tax. In the city of Winchester, for example, during the fourteenth century every baker sealed the loaves he had baked.<sup>2</sup> Throughout England, in the following century, products were marked by craftsmen such as masons, carpenters, makers of salt blocks, and coopers (who made barrels). Examples of such marks elsewhere in Europe can be found on thimbles, window leads, glassware, clay pipes, ceramic butter pots, imported wire, and kosher food.<sup>3</sup> Metals—such as gold, silver, pewter, and metal ingots—were marked by stamping. Documents were authenticated, before the advent of signatures, by marking with a cross, by the imposition of wax seals, or by tagging with lead or wax seals affixed by parchment strips or cords.

Those wanting to mark textiles sought similar means of identification, and this article will explore how and why the lead seal came to be used for the authentication of cloth.<sup>4</sup> In addition to documents, lead seals have also been used for sealing containers such as wine bottles, for the authentication of relics and sealing of reliquaries, or the sealing of rooms. But, compared with the vast quantity of literature devoted to the wax seals, they have received little attention. This study will show how the lead cloth seal has become an increasingly important area of sigillography and can illuminate the history of manufacture, trade, and taxation from the medieval to modern eras.

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I wish to offer this article in memory of Geoff Egan, a London archaeologist whose work illuminated the subject of cloth seals.

**1** For the practice of marking animals and objects, see Pim, Yatsenko, and Perrin, *Traditional Marking Systems*; and <http://markstudies.org>.

**2** For seals on bread, see Keene, *Survey of Medieval Winchester*, 255; and Furley, *Ancient Usages*, 34–35. Bread was also marked in Hereford, England, in 1557: see Morgan, *Regulations*, 2. The unusually large and flat seal matrix of Benedict the Baker in the British Museum may have been used for loaves: see Tonnochy, *Catalogue of Seal-Dies*, 25, no. 161.

**3** For seals on other objects, see Egan, “London.” For wine bottle seals, see Jeffries and Major, “Mid 17th- and 19th-Century English Wine Bottles.” Seals were also used for kosher foods: see Egan, *Lead Cloth Seals*, no. 356. Lead seals are still used by postal services and customs officials worldwide.

**4** For other non-archaeological uses of seals, see Bautier, “Notes sur des usages,” 127.

## Cloth Seals: Nature and Forms

In western Europe, cloth was usually (but not always) sealed by attaching a lead seal to the cloth itself, by bending a blank of lead over the edge of the cloth and stamping a mark or design on one or both sides of the lead. (Occasionally a wax seal was applied directly to the cloth: see below.) The lead seal for textiles first appears in the archaeological record of northern Europe in the thirteenth century, and was in widespread and continuous use until the early twentieth century. Its beginnings coincide with the development of textile trade, the expansion of urbanism, and the growth of population. This growth led to a need for more clothing and an assurance that the material of which such clothing was made was of reliable quality.<sup>5</sup>

Very occasionally, cloth seals have been found still attached to a fragment of cloth, providing valuable evidence; mostly, however, extant lead seals were detached and discarded. In these cases, the evidence for the type of cloths that were once sealed can be deduced only from the devices and inscriptions on the seal itself. Although lead decays when exposed in some conditions, such as to moisture and air (and oak drawers), it will survive well in anaerobic conditions. Moreover, even detached seals sometimes carry the imprints and fibres of the accompanying textile, so that the evidence derived from the seal can be compared with that of the textile. An example, preserved in the British Museum, is a two-part lead seal folded over the edge of a textile (Figure 7.1). Since the seal displays only an eroded image of a portcullis, it is not easy to identify—beyond being a sixteenth-century aulnage (tax) or subsidy seal. More can be said thanks to the textile, however, which was a coarse woollen fabric of dark brown colour and of a simple tabby weave: one of the most complete textile survivals attached to an English cloth seal.

Lead seals could be attached in a number of ways. Sometimes the impression was made by squeezing the lead blank between a pair of pliers or pincers and sometimes by striking the blank between dies. Sometimes the two faces were achieved by affixing the underside of the lead in an engraved metal block and pressing the obverse with another block. In medieval England seals were usually formed of two discs, one of which had a hole and the other a rivet; the connecting strip was folded so that the rivet came through the hole, fastening the seal to the cloth (Figure 7.2). By the end of the sixteenth century, however, English seals consisted of four-part seals. In France Antoine Sabatier, a physician, detected a greater range of seal forms (see below), but it is not clear how many of these are medieval in origin, or

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<sup>5</sup> The best general survey in English for Europe, comprising both manufacture and lead seals, is Endrei and Egan, "The Sealing of Cloth." See also Egan, "Leaden Seals for Textiles" and *Lead Cloth Seals*.

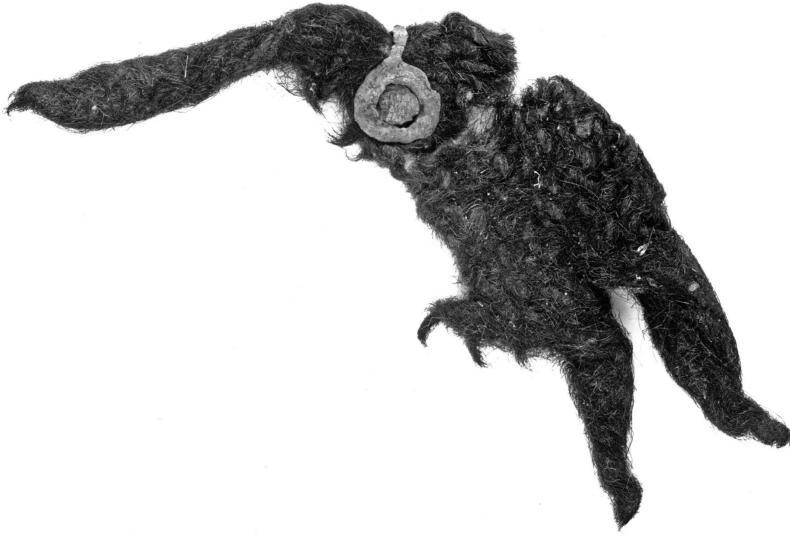


Figure 7.1. Lead cloth seal folded over and still attached to a piece of coarse woollen cloth. It shows a portcullis, indicating that it was a seal for the aulnage. BM ET B E and P 1871,0714.115. © Trustees of the British Museum.

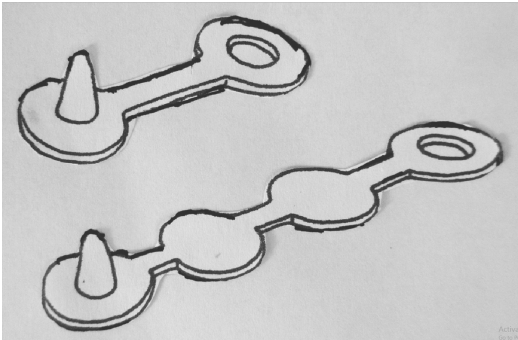


Figure 7.2. Drawing of blank two- and four-part seals, showing the pointed rivet and the circular outer disc on a two-part (above) and a four-part seal (below). After Egan, *Lead Cloth Seals*, fig. 1. Photo © John Cherry.

whether sealing technologies became similarly more complex in the early modern era. Variations in lead-sealing techniques, and their possible regional and chronological variations, constitute an interesting field for future research.

Lead seals were usually attached in the place or area of manufacture, though sometimes they could be affixed at a later time to record either the customs or tax paid. It is often difficult to determine whether a seal was used on textile rather than on other goods. Many examples are poorly struck, worn, or damaged or have



survived only in a fragmentary form. The small number of textile seals that have come down to us and the difficulty of identifying and dating them makes it doubtful that they will ever be used for accurately estimating the extent of production and the trade. Even if the place of attachment can be determined, the exact role played by the textile seal is often uncertain. The difficulty of identification, and the commercial rather than the legal function of the seals, mean that cloth seals have been largely ignored in the discourse on seals and sealing.

Lead is malleable enough to take an impression but durable enough to survive exposed on the surface of the cloth as it was transported. It was also less expensive and needed less preparation than the wax (though wax was occasionally used, as we shall see). Lead was mined widely across Europe in the Middle Ages, often as a by-product of silver; in England, for example, there were mines in Devon, the Mendip Hills (Somerset), and Derbyshire. Lead was used for seal matrices and as a substance for sealing (as in papal *bullae*), as well as for cloth seals. While there has been little research on the metallurgy of lead matrices or seals, a study undertaken on the British Museum collection shows that many cloth seals are lead-based alloys containing small amounts of tin, usually not more than 6 per cent. The tin must have been deliberately added to lower the melting point and to make the seal harder than if it were made of pure lead. In the seventeenth century, some cloth seals were also gilded through the application of mercury and the process of fire-gilding. This is another area in need of further and more systematic research on the sources of the materials, and in order to determine whether the extent of tin varied in different places and traditions.

Lead seals were usually produced as blanks in moulds, usually of stone; Plate 7.1 shows one part of a two-part mould found in London, used to cast four two-part seals (Figure 7.2).<sup>6</sup> Such moulds are often damaged and therefore difficult to date; another field for further research could begin by identifying the number and nature of surviving stone moulds across Europe, in order to create a corpus of mould types and to establish different casting practices. At present, assigning textile seals to a particular region or purpose in the textile trade is primarily achieved by analysing surviving inscriptions, which can yield evidence of the language used, the name of a town, or an indication of the seal's meaning. Often the device is heraldic: a coat of arms or other motifs. For example, the obverse might display the heraldic mark of the town, while the reverse might indicate the dimensions of the fabric. Merchants' marks used by merchants to brand bales appear rarely on cloth seals, though in England they are frequently found on the monumental brasses that

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<sup>6</sup> Museum of London, acc. no. 81.234. Crowfoot, Pritchard, and Staniland, *Textiles and Clothing*, does not mention cloth seals.



Plate 7.1. One half of a stone mould, which would have been joined to the other half by lead plugs. It was used for casting four lead blanks at a time. Museum of London MOL.81.234. © Museum of London.

were laid down in churches to commemorate their careers after death.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes names are abbreviated to initials and often, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, ligatures or scrolls are used to join the letters. In the seventeenth century the collectors of the aulnage, a tax levied by the English government, tended to put their names in full on rectangular seals. Here again, much more work is needed to identify the designs of cloth seals and their connection to particular manufacturing centres, which often used the same markings on coins and jettons.

The lead cloth seal was sometimes impressed at the place of weaving or at the time of a secondary process, such as fulling or dyeing. The sealed cloth was then often transported by land and sea to another country, and the seal may have become detached from the cloth when it was turned into a manufactured product, such as clothing, soft furnishings, or upholstery. The archaeologist can therefore find detached seals at the place of primary production, at that of a secondary process, or at the place of final use—or, indeed, anywhere, on land or sea, between those points (see below). In order to understand the significance of distribution patterns, we need to identify the circumstances in which cloth seals were created,

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<sup>7</sup> Elton (*Cloth Seals*, 375–83) provides a most useful appendix on cloth workers' privy marks.

and subsequently lost or removed. Mostly, it appears that seals were taken off by tailors in the final phase of their use of a given roll of cloth, though whether the pattern of distribution really maps the location of these tailors is doubtful. In any case, most cloth seals were presumably melted down to provide lead for other purposes; those that have been excavated may have survived by accident.

Some seals have been found either on the banks or beds of rivers, such as the Thames and the Avon. From their designs and their find locations, it seems that they were applied to cloth at the time of its dyeing, not at the time of weaving.<sup>8</sup> They may, of course, have been sealed at both stages of the manufacturing process. In England, in the late sixteenth century to the seventeenth, dyeing was regulated by the London Dyers' Company, which marked approved cloths with lead seals indicating the colourant used and the person responsible for applying it: some seals found in London accordingly carry the heraldic arms of the Dyers' Company, a chevron between three madder bags. (A madder bag contained the dye called red madder, *rubia tinctoria*.) Other seals use letters to specify certain dyes; for instance, "W" designated woad, which produced a blue-coloured cloth. The Latin numerals "I," "II," and "III," meanwhile, probably indicate the number of washes. Sometimes the initials of the Company searcher (charged with identifying faulty cloths) or the location of the dye-house are shown.<sup>9</sup>

Lead cloth seals continued to be used into the twentieth century, but their use in Europe was greatest in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During this period the number of seals affixed to each cloth increased, while the regulation of manufacture and trade became more complex. As a result, the system of sealing came to be perceived as a hindrance to trade. The English government, therefore, abandoned the seal for the aulnage tax in 1724; not only had this seal system become cumbersome, but its profits had been farmed out and benefited individuals rather than the government.

## The Origins of Textile Sealing

Lead was more commonly used for sealing in southern than in northern Europe, where wax may have been scarcer and therefore more costly, and where, most importantly, lead was also favoured by long-standing political and social traditions. Where did the practice originate, and why? To date, the tradition of lead sealing and its reception has been little studied, with most studies focused on the use of

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<sup>8</sup> Egan, "Industry and Economics" and "Leaden Seals for Textiles."

<sup>9</sup> Egan, "Cloth Seals" [2001], 43–77, contains a good account of the relationship between cloth seals, dyeing, and the river Avon at Salisbury. See also Egan, *Lead Cloth Seals*, no. 269 (dated 1628).

lead and gold bulls for documents. But we know that lead sealing was widespread in the early eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium) and in the parts of Italy under Byzantine influence, including the Roman papal curia, whose chancery issued bulled documents from the sixth century onwards.<sup>10</sup> From there, it is thought to have spread to northern Italy and Spain, and also to southern France. In Byzantine territories, lead seals were used on a very large scale, including in the silk industry. Officials in charge of organizing and taxing the silk industry applied blank roundels of lead with an iron boulloterion, shaped like a pair of pliers. Traces of rough cloth have been found on some of the early seals of the *kommerkiarioi* (commerce officials), revealing that they were affixed to bags or bales containing the precious material, and not on the silks themselves.<sup>11</sup> The special quality of the silk's dye was also indicated by the attachment of a lead seal, by the chief of the purple factories.<sup>12</sup>

The manufacture and export of silk could have provided a route by which the practice of sealing textiles with lead came to northern Europe. Silk weaving was introduced in Spain during the eighth century, since "Spanish" veils, possibly of Islamic workmanship, were given to Roman churches by Popes Gregory IV (r. 827–844) and Leo IV (r. 847–855). In the eleventh century, silk was also produced in Sicily, Lucca, and Genoa, though the finer silks worn at the Sicilian court were imported from the eastern Roman Empire.<sup>13</sup> No seals are recorded as having been attached to these silks. The first silk fabric with a lead seal still attached to it was found on the shroud wrapped around the body of a holy man, the Blessed Giacomo Salomoni, in the cathedral of Forlì; the seal, which bears the lion of St. Mark, can therefore be dated close to the year of Giacomo's death, in 1314. This is later than the first appearance of the cloth seal in northern Europe. The seal at Forlì comes from Venice, however, which may indicate that the practice of applying lead seals to textiles had a Venetian origin.<sup>14</sup> In Venice, the seal of the Silk Office bore the lion of St. Mark. By the fifteenth century, however, the Venetian authorities had developed an elaborate system for sealing different types of silk, depending on the quality and colour of the weaves. Other textiles, both cotton and woollen, were also woven in Venice, and it may be that the seals used for silks

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**10** A good summary of lead sealing from the documentary point of view may be found in Pastoureau, *Les sceaux*, 37–39. Lead was used for the manufacture of seal matrices and false seal matrices as early as the twelfth century in northern Europe, but it seems unlikely that this spurred the use of lead for sealing textiles.

**11** Cheynet and Caseau, "Sealing Practices"; Zacos and Vegler, *Byzantine Lead Seals*.

**12** Lopez, "Silk Industry."

**13** Monnas, *Merchants, Princes and Painters*.

**14** Constantini, "Le linceul." For another Venetian sealing silk in Italy, see Rizzoli, *L'università dell'arte della lana*, 101, fig. 36, no. 5.

were lighter and thinner than those for thicker textiles.<sup>15</sup> More research is needed in the rich Venetian archives in order to explain the functions and spread of lead sealing, since it is possible that Venice may have provided a model or a route for the practice of sealing textiles.

## **The Discovery, Study, and Historiography of Cloth Seals in England and France**

To understand the state of our current knowledge of cloth seals, we need to look at the history of their collecting and the previous perceptions of their uses and functions. This section compares the historiography of cloth seals in England and France, chosen as two countries in which much study has been undertaken.

### **England**

In England, the first record of a cloth seal derives from the collections of Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753), which were later to become part of the British Museum.<sup>16</sup> In the middle of the nineteenth century, excavations on the London embankment of the Thames produced many cloth seals, which were collected by Charles Roach Smith. In his catalogue, published in 1854, he (oddly) describes such seals as “marks”:

Cloth marks occur of the towns of Canterbury, Exeter, Norwich, London, Colchester and Taunton, and of places on the Continent. The marks of the manufacturers of serges [twill fabric with diagonal lines or ridges on both sides] and baize [a coarse felt-like woollen material, usually green] at Colchester are particularly numerous and mostly bear the date 1571, which was soon after the baize makers of the Netherlands, driven from their country by religious persecution, settled at Colchester.<sup>17</sup>

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**15** It would be useful to compare the thickness of silk and cloth seals. Unfortunately, the thickness of the Forli seal is not published. Little is known of Italian seals for cloths: see Doren, *Die Florentiner Wolltuchindustrie*, 98. Leaden seals seem likely to have spread to the linen industry in the fifteenth century (these fabrics had apparently been marked with linseed oil from time immemorial).

**16** MacGregor, “Sloane, Sir Hans”; Cherry, “Sir Hans Sloane and the Collecting of History.” In the early eighteenth century John Lewis published a bronze seal matrix, which he connected to fifteenth-century legislation relating to the cloth trade in England: Lewis, *A Dissertation*, 6, and frontispiece no. 5.

**17** Roach Smith, *Catalogue*, 155. See Kidd, “Charles Roach Smith.” His collection is now in the British Museum, and many cloth seals from it are published in Collections Online: [www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/search.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx). Items from this collection begin with the registration numbers B, E, and P 1857,0507.01

In general, though, cloth seals, such as those illustrated in Figures 7.3 to 7.5, aroused little interest for the rest of the nineteenth century. In the second half of the twentieth century, a fortuitous meeting between a Hungarian scholar, Professor Walter Endrei, and Geoff Egan, an archaeologist trained at Cambridge, led to the resumption of the study in England (Endrei, a social historian, had worked on English kersey, a type of coarse woollen cloth named from the village of Kersey in Suffolk). Together they produced “The Sealing of Cloth in Europe” (1982), in which Endrei considers the European background of the practice while Egan contributes information on British finds, and particularly that of lead seals. This was the most fundamental and all-embracing study of the subject at the time.<sup>18</sup>

In 1994, Egan wrote the first catalogue of local, aulnage, and foreign cloth seals in England, which provided a most useful guide to their identification. He also drew attention to the use of copper alloy seal matrices for sealing cloths with wax. Such matrices had previously been misdated by two distinguished historians of seals and sealing, Walter de Gray Birch and A. B. Tonnochy. Both had assumed that such matrices were for documents connected with the textile trade, rather than for the sealing of textiles themselves. Egan’s important insight dispelled the notion that all cloth seals were made of lead, and established that wax was also attached directly to the cloth, though no pieces of cloth with wax seals attached have ever been found. Egan’s wide survey also brought into scholarly discussion finds from post-medieval archaeological excavations in Europe and North America, and explored the extent to which cloth seals can be used to elucidate trade.<sup>19</sup> The most recent work on English cloth seals, to date, is a survey by Stuart Elton, published in 2016, which provides an illustrated guide to the identification of lead seals attached to cloth (see below).

### ***Taxation and the Cloth Seal in England***

With its wealth of information on the cloth seal as a seal of taxation, England provides a good case study. In England, the practice of aulnage sealing was distinct from the sealing of textiles by the local guild or town. Aulnage (or alnage) comes from the French word *aune*, meaning “ell” (a measure of cloth), and initially referred to the size and quality of cloth. In Richard I’s reign, from 1189 to 1199, the Assize of Cloth stated that “woollen cloths, wherever they are made, shall be of the same width, to wit, of two ells within the lists, and of the same goodness in the middle and sides.” This ordinance was developed into a tax on woollen cloth in the reign of Edward I (1270–1307), when an official called an “alnager” was appointed. His

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<sup>18</sup> Endrei and Egan, “The Sealing of Cloth.”

<sup>19</sup> Egan, *Lead Cloth Seals*, nos. 291–95.



Figure 7.3. Obverse of lead seal for the Dutch immigrant community, who came as religious refugees to Colchester in 1565 and 1570. It reads: DWTS / CO(LCH)EST .../ SAEY. 230 .../ DRAE(T) / 15(...) ("Dutch Colchester Say, 230 15(71)"). Say was a type of woollen fabric. BM BE and P S. 169 (see Egan, *Lead Cloth Seals*, no. 25). © Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 7.4. Lead cloth seal for the United East India Company, established 1708, showing the mark "V(E)IC," for "United (East) India Company." Probably found in London. BM B, E, and P 1910,0407.54 (see Egan, *Lead Cloth Seals*, no. 294). © Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 7.5. Lead cloth seal for Wesel, Germany, showing two crowned letter "B"s. The legend would have been "Finn Bombasinen der Wesel." BM B, E, and P S 214 (see Egan, *Lead Cloth Seals*, no. 318). © Trustees of the British Museum.



duty was to measure each piece of cloth, and to affix a stamp (the first reference to such a mark) to show that it was the appropriate size and quality, and that the tax had been paid.<sup>20</sup> The marking of cloths by the aulnager is first mentioned in 1328, though it may have occurred earlier.<sup>21</sup> The role of the aulnager was extended in 1353, when a cloth subsidy was introduced on each saleable textile. The first lead cloth seal for the aulnage is recorded on April 30, 1380, when it was declared that “no whole cloth half cloth or dozen made within the liberties of London be sold before it be sealed by a serjeant of the chamber, appointed for the purpose, with a seal of lead ordained [for the purpose].”<sup>22</sup> The collection of the aulnage was “farmed out” as early as the fourteenth century, meaning that the Crown accepted a fixed and certain sum for the proceeds of the tax, which might vary according to production, while the person or body who purchased the “farm” would gather in as much tax as they could. Thus, a document of 1439, which records Henry VI granting the aulnage of London to the Company of Drapers, gives details for sealing various types of cloth and their dimensions, but fails to mention the material of the seal itself. The Company then regranted the aulnage to two citizens for ten years, for a fee.<sup>23</sup>

Turning now to the sigillographic evidence, a number of extant copper alloy seal matrices have survived with a Latin inscription identifying them as the matrices for the subsidy of cloth. They display various devices, such as a crown, the crowned head of the king, the fleur-de-lis, or the royal arms. The matrix for the cloth subsidy in Kent (Plate 7.2) bears a cusped crown in the centre, over a fleur-de-lis with a legend around the edge.<sup>24</sup> The choice and relative chronology of these devices is not clear. The king’s head may be the earliest, while the later combination of the leopard’s head and fleur-de-lis dates to the reign of Edward III (1327–1377). The copper alloy matrix of the subsidy seal for London bears the arms of England with France ancient (that is, a semé de fleurs-de-lis), which

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**20** Lipson, *Economic History of England*, 461–62, 494.

**21** The series of copper alloy matrices was first published by Birch, *Catalogue*, nos. 1060–63; and Tonnochy, *Catalogue of Seal-Dies*, nos. T29–33, T52. Egan (*Lead Cloth Seals*, 9) has shown that their dating of the matrices is inaccurate. Observations on this series have been made by Cherry, “Heads, Arms and Badges,” especially 14; and Ailes, “Powerful Impressions,” especially 22. There is a need for a full survey of these seals and their impressions, together with the documentary evidence for their manufacture.

**22** Sharpe, ed., *Calendar*, 145–46.

**23** Johnson, “History,” 216–20.

**24** London, British Museum B, E, and P 1920,0415: see Egan, *Lead Cloth Seals*, no. 46. Another is that referred to by Lewis, *A Dissertation*, 6, and frontispiece no. 5. More medieval cloth subsidy seal matrices have since been found in England and recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS): see Christie, “Medieval Britain and Ireland,” 300 and fig. 5.





Plate 7.2. Face of the fifteenth-century copper alloy matrix, and a modern cast from it, for the subsidy for Kent. BM B E and P 1920,0415.18 (see Egan, *Lead Cloth Seals*, no 46).  
© Trustees of the British Museum.

must date it between 1340 and 1405.<sup>25</sup> The royal arms continued to appear in the fifteenth century, when the system was reorganized. On the copper alloy matrix of the cloth subsidy for Salisbury (Plate 7.3) there appear the rose and the Sun, badges of the Yorkist Kings of England (1461–1485).<sup>26</sup> Such matrices could have been used for wax or lead, though we know that lead gradually replaced wax for cloth sealing in the fifteenth century. A statute of 1464 specifies the use of lead seals with stamps on both sides. Another statute required wax sealing at both ends of the textile, except on the cloths of London and Bristol, on which lead was to be used as previously (*come il ad este accustume*). It may be that sealing cloths with wax was practised only in lesser centres of the cloth trade. Indeed, the only known use of a cloth subsidy matrix to make an impression in wax occurs on a parchment document, dated 1380, relating to a property transfer in Monmouth, on the Welsh border. There is no known relationship between the sigillant, John Brugge (whose name is more likely to mean John of the Bridge than John from Bruges), and the aulnage system. It was simply an arbitrary use of the matrix.<sup>27</sup>

In 1483/4 legislation decreed that the seals for the aulnage were to have the arms of England on one side and those of the local town or city on the other. This helps us to distinguish aulnage subsidy seals impressed between 1483 and 1553.

<sup>25</sup> Rye, *Catalogue*, 160, no. 96.

<sup>26</sup> Cherry, "Seal Matrices and Impressions," 321.

<sup>27</sup> The document is illustrated in Egan, *Lead Cloth Seals*, 160, fig. 9. The charter is at London, British Library, Add. Ch. 55, 247.



Plate 7.3. Modern impression from the late fifteenth-century copper alloy matrix for the subsidy for Wiltshire. It is inscribed "S' SUBC'PANNOR'IN COM'VVILTEC." British Museum B, E, and P 1851,11–21.2 (see Egan, *Lead Cloth Seals*, no. 104). Reproduced with permission of the Salisbury Museum. Photo © John Cherry.

Such seals are known only from London and Bristol, however.<sup>28</sup> In 1551/2 there was a major revision of the aulnage system via the Great Statute of Clothing, which increased the number of distinct textiles subject to the aulnage, including some new fabrics, by about thirty. For this, a new series of seal matrices was engraved with different county names, with the initials "ER" (for Edwardus Rex, Edward VI) and the date "1553" in Arabic numerals. Most systems of taxation lead to avoidance, however, and clothiers often attempted to avoid fees by the manufacture of counterfeit seals. In 1418 an assembly headed by the mayor of Salisbury and the king's aulnager in Wiltshire found that John Corscombe, one of the city's leading clothiers—who had himself held the post of aulnager four years previously—had twenty-one colour-stripped (*straguil*) cloths (a local speciality) in his house, all sealed with forgeries of the royal and city cloth seals.<sup>29</sup> No counterfeit seals have

<sup>28</sup> Egan, *Lead Cloth Seals*, 23, no. 4, and "Cloth Seals" [2001], 49, no. 1; Birch, *Catalogue*, no. 1062.

<sup>29</sup> Egan, "England's Post-Medieval Cloth Trade," 6; Carr, *The First General Entry Book*, 54, entry 190.

yet been identified for this date, but seals bearing a poorly rendered version of the portcullis, dating from the next century and mentioned above, are thought to be counterfeits placed on unexamined cloths to avoid paying tax.

In the sixteenth century, faulty cloths also acquired their own seals, a peculiarity of the English system. Originally, textiles with serious defects would be destroyed, but now a seal stamped with a letter "F" was to be attached to defective cloths, later to be replaced with a seal reading "faultie" in full. So a seal that had begun as a mark of quality now indicated faulty production. At the same time, seals were expected to include the length in yards. Early in the reign of Elizabeth I, the initial "Y" (for "yards") indicated length, while weight was denoted with the initial "P," for "pounds." Sometimes width was indicated, too.<sup>30</sup> Seals had thus acquired the nature of a label.

In the seventeenth century, the official inspecting the cloth applied an additional searcher's seal, usually stamped with the initials or name of the searcher. In 1605, the profits of the aulnage were farmed out by the Crown to a favourite of James I, Ludovic Stewart (1583–1624), the Duke of Lennox and Richmond, as aulnager-general for England. This may indicate the difficulties involved in obtaining full payment of the revenues from an aulnage system that had become extremely complex, as evidenced by John May's book published in 1613. May advocated the use of six, rather than four, seals: one for the length of the piece after immersion in water, to induce any shrinkage; one for width and defects; a searcher's seal for weight, another for length after tentering (stretching), and others for shearing and fulling; and, finally, the official aulnage seal. His recommendations were not carried out, but they speak to the difficulty of controlling quality through many different stages of production.<sup>31</sup> The system clearly had become over-complex. Moreover, the practice of sealing as a form of taxation was seen as a hindrance to trade and a burden on the producers and merchants. Ultimately, the office of the aulnager and the system of sealing for the purposes of taxation were abolished in 1724.<sup>32</sup>

### France

Just as discoveries on the banks of the Thames gave impetus to the study of cloth seals in England, so in France, at the same time, the discovery of lead seals in the embankment of the river Seine gave Arthur Forgeais (1822–1878), a numismatic

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<sup>30</sup> Egan, *Lead Cloth Seals*, 23, no. 4; Birch, *Catalogue*, no. 244.

<sup>31</sup> May, *A Declaration*, 14–15.

<sup>32</sup> Although this was the ending of the aulnage seal, clothiers continued to seal cloths with seals advertising their firms. A recent find in Somerset of excavated cloth seals issued by the firm of Weres and Company dating from the late eighteenth century. This firm continued sealing its cloths at least into the nineteenth century: see Burnett, "Finds Reported."

scholar, the opportunity to study them. Forgeais mainly concentrated his attention on pilgrim badges, however, and neglected the cloth seals.<sup>33</sup> In 1912, Antoine Sabatier turned his attention to lead seals as evidence for French fiscal administration and guild regulations in his *Sigillographie historique des administrations fiscales, communautés ouvrières et institutions diverses ayant employé des sceaux de plomb (XIV<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, which was subtitled *Plombs historiés de la Saône et de la Seine*. Sabatier discussed and illustrated a wide variety of lead seals, ranging from those issued at fairs by customs officials (for materials such as salt, tobacco, cloth, linen, silk, braid, paper, and bonnets, and for gilding) to those used by royal agents, commercial companies, and hospitals, and for the identification of foreign textiles. His work revealed that the practice of using lead seals seems to have been more widespread and diverse throughout France before the Revolution than anywhere else, extending to craftsmen and manufacturers and including the marking of packages and bales, among other uses. He noted that these lead seals were usually circular, and that the pointed-oval shape, so common among wax seals attached to charters and documents, was unknown. He also observed that these seals were moulded in advance of sealing in different forms, some in globules, others in small spheres or rectangular plaques, all of which would have been pierced for tags. Sabatier was the first to classify seals by different methods of closure. There were seals with a tunnel (*sceaux à tunnel*), seals with plates (*sceaux à plateaux*), seals with a loop or handle (*sceaux cebélières*), seals with a hole (*sceaux troués*), and, lastly, seals that clipped on (*sceaux agrafés*). The first two types were the most common and the last three had specialized uses.<sup>34</sup>

In the 1990s, Dominique Cardon considered the use of cloth seals as evidence for the control of the cloth industry. For her, the application of seals was part of the system developed to regulate the practice of home working, in which the weavers and their families worked in private houses, and officials were appointed to inspect their work, to ensure adequate quality. By reviewing the ordinances governing the trade, she showed that the cloth seal was often applied at the place of control, rather than at the place of manufacture, and that the seal validated the length and weight of the piece.<sup>35</sup> She drew special attention to two collections of lead seals. The first, in the Museo Bottacino of Padua, was recovered from the canals of the town; the second was collected by Abbé Eugène Cortade from the sand of the port of Collioure, in southern France, near the Spanish border. Cardon also

<sup>33</sup> Forgeais, *Collection*. Sabatier explicitly noted that Forgeais passed over commercial and fiscal seals in complete silence.

<sup>34</sup> Sabatier, *Sigillographie historique*, 5–30, and “Étude revisionnelle.”

<sup>35</sup> Cardon, *La draperie*, 594–600. The cloth seals of Padua are not included in Rizzoli, *I sigilli*.

explored the written sources, which revealed that the making of false dies was a widespread concern, with denunciations of this practice registered at major cloth-producing centres such as Valenciennes, Ypres, and Cologne. In 1372, the citizens of Tourcoing applied for permission to have a seal engraved with their communal arms, so that they could mark and guarantee the quality of their cloths.<sup>36</sup>

A recent study by Jean-Louis Roch concentrates on the cloth seals of Rouen, showing how they changed according to the materials being sealed. After 1424, cloth was sealed with the letters “SR” (for “Sceau de Rouen”), under a crown on the obverse and with an *Agnus Dei* on the reverse; this was a symbol of the town, and also appears both on the city seal (from the middle of the thirteenth century) and on the seal matrix of the mayor. In the seventeenth century, however, a new textile, fine serge, was developed in Rouen, which was sealed with a special seal bearing the legend “DE ROUEN” in the middle and including the word “SERGE.” More importantly, Roch draws attention to the official registers kept during the eighteenth century, which contain impressions of the marks and seals used as a record of their authenticity.<sup>37</sup>

## Textiles and Trade

As noted above, the origins of the practice of lead sealing in northern Europe—that is, beyond the Mediterranean basin—are unclear. To date, the earliest textile seal identified in this region is a lead seal found at Amsterdam, in an archaeological layer dating to 1275. This seal shows a key, with wards upwards, and bears the legend “+VAN LEUDEN,” which means that the cloth came from Leiden, a notable cloth-manufacturing city in the Low Countries. It was known in the medieval period as the *Sleutelstadt* (key city), since the main church was dedicated to St. Peter and the arms of the city contained two red keys: hence the key on the seal.<sup>38</sup> This find emphasizes the place of production and suggests an active trade in cloth from Leiden to Amsterdam. We do not know how quickly the practice of sealing textiles with leaden seals spread to other countries and towns, or even if the Low Countries were the first to adopt this practice—although this is plausible. For example, another early lead seal for cloth comes from Malines (Mechelen), a

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**36** Cardon, *La Draperie*, 600; Tourcoing’s request indicates the importance attached to such seals.

**37** Roch, “Les sceaux.”

**38** Amsterdams Archaeologische Dienst WA-136-1: see Egan, *Lead Cloth Seals*, 1–2, British Museum, B, E, and P 1992,0204.52. Another sixteenth-century seal with the keys of Leiden has been published by Egan, “Cloth Seals” [2012], 240–41.

Flemish centre for the production of fine woollens.<sup>39</sup> It was discovered in London, in a late fourteenth-century archaeological layer at Swan Lane, in 1981. On one side the seal bears the arms of Malines (three pallets) surrounded by the name of Floris Berthoult (fl. 1275–1331), a leading potentate in the region. The other side displays a crosier with the inscription “EPS LEODI,” a reference to the bishop-princes of Liège, whose authority Malines acknowledged from 1305 onwards.<sup>40</sup>

On both the seals of Leiden and Malines, heraldry is an important part of the design and helps identify the seals’ origins. On the cloth seals of Rouen, the name of the city is abbreviated (“SR”), suggesting that its cloth was so well known as to need no other identification. The cloth seals of Augsburg, in Germany, displayed the letter “A” and a pine cone, which was also used for Augsburg silver marks. Augsburg produced textiles known as fustians (mixed linen warp and cotton weft fabrics) which, known in England as Ousbrow fustians or Augusta fustians, were sealed with seals bearing the letter “A.” Such seals are found in at least a dozen counties in England, representing one of the most common and widespread of all textile imports.<sup>41</sup> England also imported textiles from further afield, since a seal from Elblag (Elbing) in Poland has been found in Salisbury.<sup>42</sup>

On some seals, the language of their legends permits geographic identification. In Wesel, Germany, bombazines (a fabric of silk and wool or, later, cotton and wool) were produced from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth and were exported into England in the seventeenth century. Their seals have two crowned “B”s in the centre, with the legend “Finn Bombasinen der Wesel” (Figure 7.5). Here, the initials reflect the name of the fabric rather than the place.<sup>43</sup> Strasbourg also provided seals with a German legend, reflecting its German identity until 1681.<sup>44</sup>

The evidence that cloth seals provide for England’s post-medieval cloth trade was reviewed by Egan in 1995.<sup>45</sup> North Sea trade is indicated by a lead seal from Gouda, found in Warkworth, in northern England. One side reads “GOV/DA” and

**39** Munro, “Economic Depression.”

**40** Egan, *Lead Cloth Seals*, 112, 194, fig. 43, no. 325. More late medieval seals from Malines have been recorded in England (in London and Yorkshire) than from any other single location on the Continent.

**41** *Ibid.*, 106. They are also found in great numbers on the Continent: see Noël Hume, *Martin’s Hundred*, 190–91; and Egan, “A Group of Seals” and “Leaden Cloth Seals.”

**42** Egan, “Cloth Seals” [2001], 73, no. 164.

**43** *Ibid.*, no. 318.

**44** *Ibid.*, nos. 101–5, 305. The registration number for the Strasbourg seal in the British Museum is B E and P SI 181. Sir Hans Sloane’s collection contained a thick cloth seal from Strasbourg, which seems not to have been found in the earth.

**45** Egan, “England’s Post-Medieval Cloth Trade.”

the other “HEPERSEE” [“R”?“K”], probably the name of a clothier or merchant. It probably dates from the sixteenth or seventeenth century, though an identical find from Deventer has been dated to 1500.<sup>46</sup>

In the post-medieval period, trade between European countries became inter-continental, an expansion attested by cloth seals. The Africa Royal Adventurers was one of the first companies to pursue trade with West Africa, though no lead cloth seals have been found in Africa; all the known examples come from England.<sup>47</sup> The United East India Company (VEIC, established in 1708) also used seals to mark textiles. Some textiles were intended for export, not only to India but also to China and the rest of Asia, including the area now comprising Malaysia and Indonesia. Seals attached to these textiles (Figure 7.4) display the company’s initials, “VEIC,” and figures that probably refer either to the length and weight of the cloth or to consignment numbers.<sup>48</sup> In the Americas, cloth seals have been found and studied in many colonial settlements, notably Jamestown.<sup>49</sup> Lead seals recovered in ships by nautical archaeology confirm the development of shipping in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Examples include some 150 seals found in a shipwreck off the south coast of Norway, dated to the 1630s or 1640s,<sup>50</sup> and the cloth seals found in the wreck of the Dutch East Indiaman the *Batavia*, which sank off the coast of western Australia in 1629.<sup>51</sup>

## Future Research

A corpus of all shipwreck finds of textiles and seals would be of the greatest value in assessing which textiles were sent where, and when, and would enable the mapping of trade patterns.

Dating and establishing the provenance of cloth seals is crucial to their analysis, since the functions of these seals differed in times and places. They could signal the payment of taxation; the provenance, size, quality, defectiveness, or size of the fabric; and even the use of dyes and other substances. Nevertheless, whereas

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<sup>46</sup> Egan, “Report of the Portable Antiquities,” 308: PAS NCL-801996.

<sup>47</sup> Egan, *Lead Cloth Seals*, no. 291.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., no. 294. See also Egan, “Leaden Seals: Examples”; Montgomery, *Textiles in America*; and Noël Hume, *Martin’s Hundred*.

<sup>49</sup> For cloth seals found in Jamestown, see <http://historicjamestowne.org/selected-artifacts/lead-cloth-seals>.

<sup>50</sup> Molaug, “Lasten i Bambelvraket.”

<sup>51</sup> See <http://museum.wa.gov.au/maritime-archaeology>. This is only one of a number of significant wrecks that occurred off the coast of western Australia.



many wax seals are still attached to documents, which can provide valuable information about sealers, cloth seals are rarely found attached to textiles, and thus lack such enabling context. This can be remedied by exploring both local and national archives across Europe, in order to understand the use of seals in textile manufacture and the way that their use varied regionally. It is only by analysing the documentary sources for the manufacture and trade in textiles that one can discover this. All too often, the archaeological evidence for regulation is left to a few pages in an appendix, or even just a footnote, in works on textile history. Cardon has shown what scholarly research can achieve for the French textile industry, providing a model for other regional studies of the textile industry and its archaeology.<sup>52</sup>

The process of identifying cloth seals must also rely on the seals' design features, which means that we need a comprehensive catalogue of these. The most comprehensive reference catalogue to date in English is that produced by Elton, which includes seals found within, or originating from, the United Kingdom. Illustrated with clear digital colour photographs, the catalogue begins with the cloth seals produced in known locations, then deals with seals for types of cloth and named seals for faulty cloth. Elton also makes a first attempt to provide a typology of seal devices by including an appendix of "distinctive identification features on cloth seals"; additionally, he includes valuable lists of known aulnagers and their agents, and known sixteenth- and seventeenth-century clothworkers' privy marks (merchants' marks).

Apart from the problem of identification, one of the key questions for further research is the way in which the cloth seal developed in Europe. Much needs to be done to track and understand the appearance of the Mediterranean lead seal in northern Europe. Far more research, particularly in Spain and Italy, would help to determine how widely the use of the lead seal in the eastern Roman Empire was adopted. Too often, seal specialists have been bounded within the narrow confines of countries and specialities. It is appropriate, in this issue of *The Medieval Globe*, to call for more research across national boundaries.

Another fruitful approach would be the comparative study of lead sealing practices beyond the Middle Ages. It may seem strange to suggest this in a journal of medieval studies, but the sealing of goods and textiles does not respect the simplistic division between medieval and modern. The recent discovery of many seals with Russian inscriptions in Scotland, mainly dating from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth, has enabled John Sullivan to make a major and authoritative study of the Russian cloth trade with Britain, which reveals that seals were also attached to fur. Moreover, his project involves the identification

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52 Cardon, *La draperie*.



of Russian lead seals attached to flax bales from northern English and Scottish mills, and makes a very useful distinction between bale seals, used to tie huge quantities of raw vegetable material, such as hemp and flax plants, and those seals that fastened together bags of smallish items, such as cement, manure, tea, flour, or sugar.<sup>53</sup>

With respect to the medieval period, the number of cloth seals on which Egan and Endrei's study was based is infinitesimal compared with the number of seals that were attached to cloth. New finds and discoveries, in increasing the corpus of extant cloth seals, will further our understanding of them. A recent find of 266 cloth seals in the river Wear at Durham, the largest river assemblage of seals outside London, is being examined by Gary Bankhead, whose work contributes to our understanding of European, and especially Hanseatic, trade.<sup>54</sup> In England and Wales, lead cloth seals are often registered by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS), which records finds by metal detectorists and other individuals in an online database. This is becoming an increasingly important tool for scholars. If one searches for "cloth seal with images," for example, 2,584 entries appear.<sup>55</sup> This constitutes a considerably larger sample than the whole of the British Museum collection. The PAS finds can also be analysed geographically by the counties in which they have been found (Norfolk: 450; Suffolk: 231; Lincolnshire: 207; Hertfordshire: 181; and Greater London Authority: 160). It is noteworthy that all of these are in the east of England. The first western English county to yield cloth seals is Somerset, with ninety-four items. Of the seals from Lincolnshire, sixteen can be categorized as medieval, but only three of these can be identified precisely—two from Malines and one from Ypres—perhaps demonstrating the importing of cloth through Lincolnshire ports.

Research will also be facilitated by the online publication of museum collections. The British Museum (collections online) displays 645 results for the search term "cloth seal" (though some of these are Japanese cloth paintings with seals). The search for "textile seal" produces 216 results. This resource is especially important because very few museums exhibit cloth seals, so there is very little opportunity for a visitor to see them. A notable and excellent exception is the Museum de Lakenhal ("cloth hall") in Leiden. Dating from 1641, this building features weathered sculptures showing the searching and sealing of cloths (Figure 7.6) at a time when

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**53** Sullivan, *Russian Cloth Seals*. There is much ongoing research on this: see <http://peacehavens.co.uk/BSHOME.htm>.

**54** Bankhead, "A Cultural, Scientific, and Technical Study."

**55** See <https://finds.org.uk>.



Figure 7.6. Stone sculpture from Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden, showing guild officials inspecting cloth. On the left is an official applying the seal with a hammer. Reproduced with permission of the Lakenhal Museum, Leiden. Photo: A. Dingjan (detail).

the sealing of cloth was at its height. In 2012, a cloth seal was adopted as the museum's emblem, giving a new life to the cloth seal in this century.<sup>56</sup>

Cloth seals, if properly identified, will show patterns of textile trade. It is likely that those buying the textiles did not need the seals to tell them where the cloth had come from. Cloth seals may have confirmed the salesman's patter; they surely satisfied governments that tax had been paid.

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**56** The Lakenhal has a good website, <http://lakenhal.nl/en/story/leiden-cloth>, dedicated to the history and variety of Leiden cloth.

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**Abstract** This survey explores the origins of the lead cloth seal and its use in the primary production process of cloth making, secondary processes such as dyeing, and widespread application in the taxation and the regulation of trade. It concentrates especially on the discovery, study, and historiography of cloth seals in England and France, and explores how the study of such seals provides evidence for manufacturing and commerce in the medieval and post-medieval worlds.

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**Keywords** cloth seals, archaeology, collecting, England, France, trade, commercial marks, matrix, taxation, sigillography

# ARCHAEOLOGY AND SIGILLOGRAPHY IN NORTHERN EUROPE

MICHAEL ANDERSEN

ANYONE FAMILIAR WITH the study of sigillography will know that the word “seal” (Latin: *sigillum*) has two meanings. A seal is both a seal impression and a seal matrix, the tool used to make the impression. By noting this, we have already touched upon the complexity that characterizes seals: they may appear straightforward, but in actual fact they are multifaceted and complicated. This article will examine the contribution of archaeological evidence to our understanding of the circulation of seals in medieval Europe. When seals are considered solely as archival artefacts, it is not possible to retrieve the full range of their operations. A primary function of medieval seal impressions was to validate and authorize the contents of letters and documents. Seals were not the sole means of authentication available during the Middle Ages, however. Documents could also be validated by notaries. In general, recourse to notaries was much more widespread in southern than in northern Europe; in France, for instance, it has been shown that there were more sealed medieval letters in northern than in southern regions.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, medieval awareness of this pattern is found in two descriptions of miracles associated with Saint Bridget, which the bishop of Linköping in Sweden sent to the Pope on September 10, 1377, and August 2, 1378, sealed with the bishop’s and a number of canons’ seals. The letters explained that notaries were rarely employed in Sweden and that trust was not placed in them, but in seals (“quia notariorum usus rarus est in terra ista, nec eis creditur sed sigillis”).<sup>2</sup>

If the extent of sealing’s significance was limited to documentary validation, however, modern impressions of newly found matrices would suffice to study their graphic and iconographic features. Yet additional information can be derived from consideration of the design and material of recently discovered matrices, together with the archaeological circumstances of their discoveries. Context is essential to the study of seals. Many archives contain collections of medieval seal impressions, mainly in wax, that have been cut from documents and thus separated from the context of their production. Hence, these detached seals have lost part of their evidentiary potential. The same applies to seal matrices that have entered private or public collections without a known provenance. Medieval seal matrices have been

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1 Bedos-Rezak, “Medieval Women,” 1.

2 Anderson and Granlund, eds., *Kulturhistorisk leksikon*, vol. 12, 366.





Plate 8.1. Seal matrix of Roskilde Cathedral: walrus ivory, twelfth century. National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen. Photo: Lennart Larsen.

traded or exchanged by collectors for centuries, and many are presently kept in museums with no registered trace of their original owners. Their diminished value as objects of research may thus be compared to that of detached seal impressions.

Nonetheless, the context or provenance of a seal matrix may be established by documenting its itinerary from a medieval institution to a modern collection. For example, a beautiful matrix of walrus ivory was made for Roskilde Cathedral in Denmark during the first half of the twelfth century, and depicts the patron saint of the cathedral, St. Lucius (Plate 8.1). This matrix entered the Royal Danish Kunstkammer during the seventeenth century, and from there it came to the National Museum of Denmark.<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, a context can be established by examining the archaeological site where a matrix and other objects have been

<sup>3</sup> Copenhagen, National Museum of Denmark, Inv. no. 9099. See Andersen, "Seglstamper fra middelalderen," 59.

found. As I hope to show, archaeology has much to offer sigillography. Before returning to seal matrices per se, I will briefly survey the non-diplomatic use of seals—that is, the functions seals fulfilled as objects, outside the context of documentary authorization.

### Seal Impressions on Objects, and Objects Shaped as Seals

Today, if seals are used at all, they are used for authentication or to seal something closed. These functions were both common during the medieval period. Containers, such as reliquaries, could be sealed to ensure that they were not opened by unauthorized people. Additionally, sealers validated reliquaries' contents with their own seals, so that it would not be necessary to open and investigate the container. For example, the contents of St. Severin's reliquary, in the Church of St. Severin in Cologne, were guaranteed and sealed five times between 948 and 1966.<sup>4</sup> When consecrating an altar that also contained or covered relics, a bishop could seal it, thereby leaving evidence that it had been properly sanctified by the appropriate church official. In certain cases, loose seal impressions with no traces of previous attachment have been left inside reliquaries, which suggests that unattached seals had an independent function. Such examples are documented in the Church of St. Kunibert in Cologne.<sup>5</sup>

Seals were also used in contexts when neither closure nor validation was involved. A seal shape is characteristic of pilgrim badges, such as those from Le Puy and Rocamadour in France,<sup>6</sup> and from Livonia (probably Riga) in today's Latvia.<sup>7</sup> They certified that pilgrims had visited the holy place of pilgrimage and suggested that they had been touched by its saint, as the legend from Rocamadour reads: SIGILLVM BEATE MARIE DE ROCAMADOR ("Seal of the Blessed Mary of Rocamadour": Figure 8.1).<sup>8</sup> Similarly, many religious amulets, which often lack any form of inscription, are shaped like seals. These include bronze fittings, in some cases gilded, which were intended to be sewn onto clothing or textiles. Similar fixtures are known from extant reliquaries, which may have been furnished with cloth covers and sewn-on accessories. St. Bridget's reliquary in Vadstena Abbey, Sweden, provides an example.<sup>9</sup> A number of dies for the production of such

4 Oepen, "Die Öffnungen des Severinusschreins," 76ff.

5 Ewald, *Siegelkunde*, 30–31.

6 Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs*, 233ff.

7 Andersson, *Pilgrimsmärken*, 54–55.

8 Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs*, 235.

9 Lindblom, *Birgittas gyllene skrin*, 48; Andersson, *Vadstena klosterkyrka*, 95.



Figure 8.1. Pilgrim badge in the shape of a seal from Rocamadour, France; found at Tårnborg, Denmark. National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen. Photo: Rasmus Holst Nielsen.

ornaments have been found, for instance at Lund, the seat of the medieval Danish archbishopric (which today is located in Sweden) (Plate 8.2).<sup>10</sup>

Seal-like objects are also found in the burials of distinguished individuals, where a tablet indicating his or her identity would accompany the deceased. Tablets might be made of stone, but in over 300 known instances the material used was lead. This was the case especially in central and western Europe, and in Denmark as well.<sup>11</sup> These tablets, which date to the central and later Middle Ages, are usually rectangular; but examples shaped like seals have been found in Denmark, excavated from the burials of several bishops in Ribe Cathedral (Plate 8.3).<sup>12</sup> As is the case with pilgrim badges, the seal shape was far from arbitrary, adding an authoritative element to the tablet.

Twelfth-century seal-shaped lead tablets belong to the tradition of depositing a lead seal matrix in the grave.<sup>13</sup> In one instance, Bishop Ulger of Angers (d. 1148) was even buried with the impression of his own seal, in lead, on a cord around his neck. The bishop himself is depicted on the seal with a crozier in one hand, his right hand raised in blessing, and he is identified by this legend: SIGILLV(M) VLGERII ANDEGAUORVM EP(ISCOP)I (Figure 8.2).<sup>14</sup> As far as we know, this example is

<sup>10</sup> Andersen, "Om de såkaldte," 80ff.

<sup>11</sup> Meier, *Die Archäologie*, 209.

<sup>12</sup> Møller and Nyborg, eds., *Danmarks kirker*, 527.

<sup>13</sup> See below, at note XX and page XXX.

<sup>14</sup> Urseau, "La tombe," 57–58.



Plate 8.2. Die sheet for stamping metal ornaments, found in Lund (Sweden). The ornaments, some seal shaped, were made of copper, which was possibly gilded. Lund University Historical Museum. Photo: Paul Eklöv Pettersson.



Plate 8.3. Three seal-shaped lead tablets, found in an ossuary built in Ribe Cathedral (Denmark) in the second half of the twelfth century. The tablets identify bishops Odinkar (d. 1043), Nothulf (d. 1140), and Asser (d. 1142). National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen. Photo: John Lee.



Figure 8.2. Lead seal impression found in the tomb of Bishop Ulger of Angers (d. 1148), hung around his neck. Ministère de la culture (France), Médiatèque de l'architecture et du patrimoine.

unique: the bishop was apparently provided with a sign of his identity, perhaps in anticipation of future openings of the grave, or even of the Last Judgment. The seal hanging from the bishop's neck is as much a mark of authentication as it is when attached to a charter.

An important group of objects, medieval church bells, are often overlooked in the study of seals and their uses, despite the fact that pilgrim badges, metal ornaments, and actual seal impressions can be identified on many of them. Indeed, the production process for making church bells involved using wax in a fashion quite similar to the production of seal matrices, which used the same lost-wax process, though seal matrices were also frequently cast in stone or cuttlebone moulds (made from the internal bone of a cuttlefish). In the case of church bells, a wax model of the bell was covered in clay. When the clay was fired, the wax model melted and ran out, after which molten bronze was cast in the hardened clay mould, which was broken off when the metal had cooled.<sup>15</sup> The wax model itself could be decorated with inscriptions or designs, while coins, metal ornaments, and pilgrim badges could also be added to the finished bell. These devices were not seals but they might be seal-shaped. Moreover, an actual sealing might take place if the personal seal of the donor was placed on the bell he commissioned,<sup>16</sup> or if

<sup>15</sup> On this technique, see, most recently, Weinryb, *The Bronze Object*.

<sup>16</sup> Uldall, *Danmarks middelalderlige kirkeklokker*, e.g., 39, 55.





Figure 8.3. Seal of bell founder on a fourteenth-century bell from Lumby Church, Denmark. The inscription on the seal reads “s(igillum) andrei filii lavrentii” (seal of Andrew son of Lawrence). After Uldall, *Danmarks middelalderlige kirkeklokker*.

the founder himself placed his own seal upon the bell, and thus added his maker's mark. This practice is often seen on Danish and Swedish late medieval church bells (Figure 8.3).<sup>17</sup> Since most artefacts surviving from the Middle Ages do not display a maker's mark, including those objects that today would be classified as art, these church bells constitute a special group. Even though no seal matrices of Scandinavian bell founders are known to survive, many of their seal impressions are preserved. In England, surviving imprints of the seal of the bell founder and brazier Andrew of Gloucester show that he also manufactured bronze cooking pots.<sup>18</sup> The same seal could have been used for bells as for documents, too, though no such examples survive.

A seal on a church bell tells us about its origin. The same applies to the seals that were extensively used to mark cloth for export.<sup>19</sup> Cloth seals have been found in significant quantities, especially by metal detectorists. From the fifteenth century onwards these were die-stamped pieces of lead attached to the roll of cloth as a mark of its provenance and conformity with standards of quality. The earliest

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., e.g., 31, 56, 58, 63, 67.

<sup>18</sup> Blair and Ramsay, *English Medieval Industries*, 99–100.

<sup>19</sup> See the essay by John Cherry in this issue.

cloth seals were probably made of wax, however, as evidenced by English bronze seal matrices for sealing with wax dating to the fourteenth century. At least three such matrices have been recorded, one of them indirectly, because a seal impression in wax is preserved on a late fourteenth-century document.<sup>20</sup>

### Seal Matrices from an Archaeological Perspective

I now return to the largest group of medieval seals: those associated with documents. There are many more preserved examples of seal impressions than there are extant matrices. This is not surprising, since seal matrices are unique objects, while the seal impressions issued from them were produced in large numbers. It is only rarely possible to associate a specific seal matrix with a preserved documentary seal impression. Thus, from a heuristic viewpoint, seal matrices and seal impressions complement each other. Archaeological finds can therefore shed new and statistically significant light upon our knowledge of the distribution of seals in society, besides making other important contributions to sigillography.

The number of preserved seal matrices is small, because it was common practice to destroy them after the death of their owners, when they were either melted down (especially if made of silver) or deposited in the grave of the deceased, as noted above: there are numerous examples of European graves that contained complete or broken seal matrices. Indeed, the recent use of metal detectors—especially in Britain and Denmark, where the amateur use of metal detectors is permitted and finds are registered<sup>21</sup>—has revealed that surviving medieval seal matrices are more plentiful than scholars once supposed. Many must have been accidentally lost, but numerous finds are also associated with churches and churchyards. In Scandinavia thirty-five seal matrices have been discovered at the Cistercian monastery of Alvastra, Sweden,<sup>22</sup> and thirteen at the Franciscan church in Næstved, Denmark.<sup>23</sup> These findings have enabled us to establish the names and status of a number of the people who were buried in these places. Is the discovery of a seal matrix in a churchyard evidence that a given person has been buried there, however? This must often be the case, and yet a number of Scandinavian episcopal seal matrices found in and near churches point towards other conclusions, since the bishops in question cannot possibly lie buried where the seal dies were found (an issue to which we will return below).

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<sup>20</sup> Egan, *Lead Cloth Seals*, 2, 21; see also Cherry's essay in this issue.

<sup>21</sup> See below.

<sup>22</sup> Anderson and Granlund, eds., *Kulturhistorisk leksikon*, vol. 15, 212.

<sup>23</sup> Haxthausen, "Tretten middelalderlige sigilstamper," 267ff.



Plate 8.4. Lead seal matrix of Baldwin IV, count of Flanders (r. 988–1035), found at Læborg, Denmark. National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen. Photo: John Lee.

Broken, or in other ways deliberately destroyed, seals are also found in association with burials, but it cannot be assumed that the find of a deliberately broken seal reveals the existence of a previously unknown burial place. An investigation into deliberately destroyed seals found in Denmark has shown that such finds either are associated with already identified churches and churchyards, or else they were recovered at castles and fortifications.<sup>24</sup> The significant latter group can be explained because the practice of nullifying seals, by breaking them, occurred in such public places. Written sources provide evidence of individuals declaring their current seals invalid, after which they presented the new seals that would be valid from that point onwards. This event had to be witnessed, and the archaeological evidence suggests that castles or churchyards would have been natural locations for this legal ceremony.

The finding of a matrix in a given locale is not always, however, evidence for sealing practices at that locale. For example, the oldest seal matrix found in Scandinavia belonged to Count Baldwin IV of Flanders (988–1035) (Plate 8.4).

<sup>24</sup> Andersen, "Medieval Seal Matrices," 71ff.



Discovered in a potato pit at Læborg in Denmark,<sup>25</sup> and made of lead, it can hardly be argued that this remarkable find represents evidence of sealing in Denmark during the Viking period, or even that the matrix came to Denmark at this time. It may have arrived much later and might also have functioned as an amulet, or a souvenir, rather than a seal matrix.

### Contexts of Finding and Modes of Use

A number of seal matrices from medieval Scandinavia share the following characteristics: they belong to bishops, are made of lead, and were found in churchyards, but far away from the bishop's diocese. Their iconography alone does not offer any clues for the circumstances of their finding, so little would be gained from recourse to imprints issued from these matrices. An archaeological approach is necessary to interpret this body of artefacts.<sup>26</sup> Among them are the lead seal matrices of the following.

- a) Bishop Henrik of Stavanger (1207–1224). Stavanger is located in Norway, but the seal was found at the site of the demolished Mejlby Church in East Jutland, Denmark (Figure 8.4).<sup>27</sup>



Figure 8.4. Seal matrix of Bishop Henrik of Stavanger, Norway (r. 1207–1224), found at the site of the demolished Mejlby Church near Randers, Denmark. Museum of Cultural History, Oslo. Photo: Lill-Ann Chepstow-Lusty.

<sup>25</sup> Copenhagen, National Museum of Denmark, Inv. no. D 6109. Laurent, *Les sceaux des princes territoriaux belges*, vol. 1, 149, vol. 2, pl. 2.2.

<sup>26</sup> Andersen, "Bispens sidste hvilested," 137ff.

<sup>27</sup> Oslo, Museum of Cultural History, Inv. no. C 9261.



Figure 8.5. Seal matrix of Bishop Magnus of Växjö Sweden (r. ca. 1292–1319), found in the churchyard of Fakse Church, Denmark. National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen. Photo: Lennart Larsen.

- b) Biskop Magnus of Växjö (ca. 1292–1319). Växjö is located in Sweden, but the seal was recovered in the churchyard of Fakse in East Zealand, Denmark (Figure 8.5).<sup>28</sup>
- c) Bishop Jon of Skalholt: one of five bishops of that name who held office between 1322 and 1433. The matrix can most likely be attributed to the Jon whose pontificate dated from 1406 to 1413. Skalholt is in Iceland, but the matrix was found at the site of the Carmelite monastery in Aarhus, Denmark (Figure 8.6).<sup>29</sup>
- d) An unknown Bishop Henrik. The matrix was found at the site of Hemsedal stave church in Norway (Figure 8.7).<sup>30</sup>

In each case, the finding place, a churchyard, is far from the bishop's diocese, and in a foreign land at that. There are two potential interpretations of this evidence. On the one hand, the matrices might originate from graves, but at some point these graves had been destroyed and the matrices redeposited elsewhere. On the other hand, the matrices might *not* originate from graves, and were, instead, objects used in the church or churchyard and were subsequently discarded, lost, or deposited

<sup>28</sup> Copenhagen, National Museum of Denmark, Inv. no. 1619.

<sup>29</sup> Aarhus, Museum Den Gamle By, Inv. no. A. M. 81.

<sup>30</sup> Oslo, Museum of Cultural History, Inv. no. C 31615.



Figure 8.6. Seal matrix of Bishop Jon of Skalholt, Iceland (r. ca. 1406–1413), found at the site of the Carmelite monastery in Aarhus, Denmark. Den Gamle By, Aarhus. Photo: Henrik Bjerg.



Figure 8.7. Seal matrix of an unidentified Bishop Henrik, found at Hemsedal Church, Norway. Museum of Cultural History, Oslo. Photo: Lill-Ann Chepstow-Lusty.

in the ground. If we accept the first interpretation then the obvious conclusion would be that these matrices were, at one time, deposited in bishops' graves. But this interpretation is complicated by the striking location of these finds in relation to the bishops' home dioceses, the use of humble lead, and the fact that none of the matrices have been broken or made unusable in any other way.

Bishops' lead seals are known from the early Middle Ages, but examples of their usage are somewhat rare after 1200. Such seals may occasionally have been produced for special purposes, however. For example, in a letter dated March 9, 1152, the German king (later emperor) Frederick I "Barbarossa" commissioned new matrices just after his accession, for sealing in both wax and gold. By March

18 a matrix of silver for use with wax was already available; ten days later a duplicate of lead was delivered, together with equipment to stamp bulls in gold.<sup>31</sup> It is not just the prompt execution of this project that is interesting. Also noteworthy are the facts that the matrix for use in wax was supplied in both silver and lead, and that the lead matrix was delivered after the silver one, implying that it was not produced as a temporary measure—that is, until the goldsmith had finished making the fine silver die. Rather, it is clear that Frederick required a duplicate matrix, perhaps intended for his travels when, for security reasons, the silver seal was not taken along. Or were there special circumstances in which the seal was sent out to be employed in Frederick's absence? Perhaps the lead matrix was marked in some way so that, for the specially initiated, it was clear from its impressions that this matrix, and not the silver one, had been used.

To take another example: we know that when Adolph II of La Marck, bishop of Liège, died (in 1344) his various seal matrices were presented to the cathedral chapter. One of these matrices was described as a tin (more likely lead) copy of a larger silver seal of office.<sup>32</sup> Were the two matrices identical? Surely not, since one was in silver and the other in lead.

In the case of Bishop Magnus of Växjö, his lead seal matrix found in the churchyard of Fakse Church lacks a handle, which would have left no traces on the wax impressions issued from it. There are small differences between this lead matrix and surviving impressions on documents, however, suggesting an awareness of differentiated use on the part of the chancery staff. The lead seal matrix features a star at the top, which denotes the beginning of the legend. On documentary seal impressions preserved in archives, however, the seal legend begins with a cross while additional crosses feature under each of the bishop's elbows.

In the cases of both Frederick I and Magnus, small differences between the matrices could be detected by those familiar with these individuals' sealing practices, so as to distinguish between those documents sealed in their presence and those sealed in their absence by a second, deputy seal. We have accounts describing how the seal, entrusted to the chancellor and travelling with him, prompted in some cases the manufacture of a second, sedentary seal.<sup>33</sup>

In other accounts, the seal stays with the ruler, and a deputy seal is ordered as needed. So much is suggested by an account of the sale of Estonia in 1344/46 by the Danish king, Valdemar IV Atterdag (r. 1340–1375), to the Teutonic Order. To

31 Deér, "Die Siegel," 68–69; Fees, "Die Siegel und Bullen."

32 Ewald, *Siegelkunde*, 84: "Ostensum fuit in capitulo coram magistris sigillum plumbeum sive stanneum, ejusdem typarii cum magno sigillo argenteo episcopi."

33 Harvey and McGuinness, *A Guide*, 38; Ewald, *Siegelkunde*, 55.

close the deal, the king sent the knight Stig Andersen to Reval (Tallinn) with a royal signet (a small seal) and a letter permitting him to have a royal seal made when he arrived. This is confirmed by documentary evidence, which shows that the design of the royal seal on Stig Andersen's charters, issued in Estonia, is different from that of the royal seal used by the king in Denmark. According to a municipal clerk in Reval, who wrote a short chronicle of Denmark between 1346 and 1358, King Valdemar "sold the Danish duchy, represented by his envoy Stig, the knight, who had the king's seal made in the city of Reval."<sup>34</sup> The seal matrix from Reval is not preserved, so we cannot establish whether it was made of lead or how it otherwise differed from other royal seals. It is unlikely, however, that the royal seal of Reval was as finely made as the king's own great seal.

### The Exchange of Seals: A Hitherto Undescribed Practice

These examples suggest that a special messenger was often allowed to travel on missions with a deputy seal matrix and could also receive permission to have a larger, official seal made once the final destination had been reached. Such examples provide one kind of explanation for the presence of episcopal lead seal matrices that turn up in far-flung places: they might have been left there by the bishops' envoys. Another explanation involves a regional custom of exchanging seals, which is well documented in the relationship between the Danish Crown and the papacy in the fourteenth century.

On August 23, 1375, Pope Gregory XI (r. 1370–1378) wrote to King Valdemar IV Atterdag (the same Danish king who sold Estonia to the Teutonic Knights) and thanked him for the signet that the king had sent him. The Pope used the king's signet to seal his response to the king, and sent him his own signet in return, stating that the king should not appreciate the papal signet for its value but, rather, as a token of the Pope's fatherly love.<sup>35</sup> The Pope was displaying humility, but we cannot rule out the possibility that the seal matrix was a humble object, possibly made of lead. In this case, specially designed seal matrices were produced by both correspondents. The sender used his seal to identify himself and to certify that the letter came from him. The recipient, when responding to the sender, enclosed his own seal, so as to acknowledge proper receipt and confirm the legitimacy of his answer. (The original document does not exist any longer, so we do not have any traces of the seal, which would have been highly interesting.) Pope Boniface IX

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<sup>34</sup> Christensen, "Stig Andersens benyttelse."

<sup>35</sup> Christensen and Nielsen, eds., *Diplomatarium Danicum*, no. 499 (August 23, 1375): "Porro fili predilectissime signetum secretum nobis missum contemplacioni tue penes nos curiose

followed a similar practice when, fifteen years later, on October 15, 1390, he wrote to Queen Margaret I of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden: "We therefore send You, high queen, a signet, the wax impressed form of which we have kept with us, with which You can tell us what lies in Your heart."<sup>36</sup> Having kept an impression of the seal matrix he had sent to the queen, the Pope was able to monitor the authenticity of the letters he received from her. (The original diploma is kept in the Danish National Archives, but has lost its seal.)

The episcopal lead seals previously discussed may fit into this pattern of seal exchange, which would explain their discovery far beyond the bishops' dioceses, their relatively cheap and humble material, and the divergence between their iconography and that of chancery seals. A rare and remarkable find from Halltorp Church in Sweden may corroborate this hypothesis. Under the church floor a copper tin was discovered, containing four medieval seal matrices of lead, all associated with bishops. According to their inscriptions, these matrices had belonged to a Danish archbishop, Uffe of Lund; two Danish bishops, Niels of Roskilde and Ivar of Odense; and a Swedish bishop, Laurentius of Linköping. Their tenures as bishops spanned the years 1240 to 1245 and the style of the seals is also typical of this period. The find also included impressions in red, green, and white wax, together with a seal matrix of bone, the carving of which was unfinished.<sup>37</sup>

This find has hitherto been interpreted as a collection of equipment for the purpose of seal forgery.<sup>38</sup> Although this interpretation cannot be dismissed, other possibilities should be considered, including the likelihood that the clergy of Halltorp Church had epistolary relationships with the bishops whose seals were found under its floor. Alternatively, since the seals were stored together in a tin, this could point towards their repeated use over a long period. Could they have been employed in the production of letters of indulgence? Indulgences could be granted by the Pope, cardinals, special papal envoys, and bishops. Individually, a bishop could grant a person forty days' indulgence, but if several bishops acted in unison then the indulgence could be increased. Were the clergy of this church in the business of selling indulgences? To date, we have no answer to this intriguing question.

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seruabimus de hiis que futuris temporibus insidebunt cordi nostro feruenter maiestati tue sub eius impressione scripturi. Aliud autem tibi committimus sub cuius clausura queuis eciam tibi stricte placitura nobis poteris nunciare non quesumus eius ualorem considerans."

**36** Nielsen, ed., *Diplomatarium Danicum*, no. 281 (October 15, 1390): "Mittimus enim eidem serenitati quamdam premsam cuius formam cere inpressam penes nos retinuimus cum qua que tibi cordi fuerint nobis ualeas significare."

**37** Anderson, *Halltorps Kyrka*.

**38** Anderson and Granlund, eds., *Kulturhistorisk leksikon*, vol. 15, 209.

## Conclusion

Seal impressions and seal matrices tell two sides of the same story, and, as I have shown, much valuable information can be obtained if we treat seal matrices as archaeological objects, as well as documentary ones. For this reason, the importance of archaeological context cannot be overemphasized. Given the number of matrices that have been discovered, and that will continue to be found, it is very important that finders accurately record the place and circumstances of the discovery. In particular, users of metal detectors should be trained to recognize matrices and encouraged to register their finds, for example through the English Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS). In Denmark, all finds of medieval seal matrices are treasure troves, meaning that, by law, finders must transfer objects to the National Museum; they can then collect a reward. This enables the National Museum to keep an updated registrar of all medieval seal matrices that are being discovered and excavated. If a seal loses its archaeological context, it also loses a vital part of its value as a historical source.

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**Abstract** Medieval seals, traditionally considered from the perspective of their documentary function, may also be studied as archaeological artefacts. Pilgrim badges were seal-shaped, and seal matrices and seal impressions can be found on church bells, in altars, and in burial sites. The context in which matrices are excavated provides valuable information on the practices of sealing and on the values attached to seals. This article also reveals a hitherto undescribed late medieval practice whereby papal and Scandinavian royal correspondents exchanged seal matrices.

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**Keywords** medieval seals, archaeology, sigillography, papacy, exchange



# MEDIEVAL TREATIES AND THE DIPLOMATIC AESTHETIC

JESSICA BERENBEIM

THIS ESSAY BRINGS two strands of scholarship into conversation with one another: the New Diplomatic History and the study of material texts as visual culture. What follows is an examination of a significant point of contact for these two discussions: the documents of diplomacy and, more specifically, treaty ratifications in late medieval Europe. A central premise of New Diplomatic History is that it involves an understanding of diplomacy as an expanded field—in other words, there is more to diplomacy than treaties.<sup>1</sup> As this analysis will suggest, there is also more to treaties themselves. Letters of procuration, articles of agreement, and treaty ratifications all have allusive and symbolic elements, and even these most canonical sources of diplomatic history belong also to cultural history. The first part of this essay will explain some of the motivations for my choice of method and sources; the second part will offer some specific illustrative examples of that method in practice. There are important precedents for discussing both diplomacy and diplomatics in structural terms, without reference to (even widely variant) political content, and the analysis in these examples draws from and seeks to expand on them.

## Diplomacy and Textual Objects

This approach returns with new eyes to some of the most traditional subject matter of “Old” diplomatic history, by bringing some of the conceptual framework that inspires the expanded field of diplomacy back to the centre of that field, and by integrating that framework with the analytic practices of art history, visual culture studies, and the study of material texts. In doing so, this analysis

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I See Watkins, “Toward a New Diplomatic History,” 1, calling for “a multidisciplinary reevaluation of one of the oldest, and traditionally one of the most conservative, subfields in the modern discipline of history: the study of premodern diplomacy.” I will use the American term “diplomats” to refer to the field of documentary studies, rather than the British “diplomatic,” reserving the latter as the adjectival form of “diplomacy.”

also draws from long-standing practices of the so-called auxiliary sciences of diplomatics and palaeography, as well as some of the intellectual innovations of their recent practitioners. Scholars of diplomatics have always devoted attention to the material aspects of their documents, while palaeographical literature, by definition, concerns itself with the visual culture of letter forms, developing a specific vocabulary for their description; in both cases, the conceptual and theoretical implications of these methods are increasingly explicitly voiced.<sup>2</sup>

The analysis of medieval treaty documents contributes to the themes of *The Medieval Globe's* special issue on a straightforwardly practical as well as a more conceptual level. Ratifications constitute clear instances of exchanged impressions in the most literal sense: through these documents, which formally conclude diplomatic negotiations, two chanceries exchange impressions of their seals of central government. More broadly, the examination of these documents flags a critical question about the role of objects in the globalizing process. If one significant framework for conceptualizing that process is the exchange, and therefore an agreed investment of value, in particular objects—such as silk and porcelain, and of course silver and gold (“intrinsically the most useless of metals”)—then administrative documents number among those objects, and they played a role in the context of territorial expansion both within the west Eurasian system and beyond it.<sup>3</sup> The value of documents, too, is constructed rather than inherent. Like gold, their principal value relies on their assigned status by mutual or multilateral consent.

There is no such thing as a pure document, however—no documentary bullion, as it were. Even neighbouring polities such as the kingdoms of western Europe often had very different documentary conventions. It is here that close visual and textual analysis can contribute to the broader discussion about how objects more generally participated in the globalizing process. How chanceries managed to participate in a shared system of diplomacy, conducted in part through these objects, calls attention to its problematic aspects, and also demonstrates some material and conceptual practices of resolution.

The analyses in the second part of this essay therefore concentrate on a small number of examples of a particular class of document: late medieval treaty ratifications exchanged by the English royal chancery with the kingdoms of

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<sup>2</sup> See, especially, Rück, “Die Urkunde als Kunstwerk”; Guyotjeannin, Pycke, and Tock, *Diplomatique*; Rück, ed., *Graphische Symbole*; Bedos-Rezak, “Medieval Identity”; Derolez, *The Palaeography*; Webber, “L’écriture”; Parkes, *Their Hands before Our Eyes*; Bedos-Rezak, “Cutting Edge”; and Barret, Stutzmann, and Vogeler, “Introduction.”

<sup>3</sup> Belich et al., eds., *The Prospect*, esp. 3–10, 14–22 (quoting 7–8); Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*; Burns, “Notaries.”

Portugal and France, for which ratification documents survive on both sides. This material is revealing for specific reasons. In the first instance, these documents operate along well-established lines. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries documentary practices already had a very long history, and the textual, visual, and material conventions of charter production were relatively firmly fixed in chanceries across Europe.<sup>4</sup> Chanceries shared some, but by no means all, of these conventions with one another. England, France, and Portugal all had developed systems of documentary production, but their chanceries issued very different kinds of charters from one another. These charters projected authority and were able to exert control within their jurisdictions through their own specific textual, visual, and material conventions. Such well-established conventions therefore allow for a clear examination of how chanceries responded when pushed to be self-conscious about those conventions.

The system of diplomacy that produced treaty documents had also been fairly firmly established by the thirteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Treaty documents generally assumed a double nature: articles of agreement, negotiated and sealed by representatives; and ratifications, sealed and exchanged by the parties themselves. The relative logistical standardization of the diplomatic process did not extend to a material standardization of its products, however. Diplomatic charters themselves remained idiosyncratic, varied attempts at a *lingua franca* of visual communication. What emerged differed each time with respect to visual

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**4** On lay documentary literacy before and ca. 1200, see recently, in particular, Carlin and Crouch, *Lost Letters*; and Brown et al., eds., *Documentary Culture*. For the development of English documentary hands, see Webber, "L'écriture." For comparative studies of several royal chanceries in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, see the essays collected in Marques, *Diplomatique royale*; for comments on the value of the comparative study of administrative records and practices during the same period, see Bombi, "Petitioning," 65–67. In addition to those chanceries discussed in this essay, the Castilian chancery system is a particularly good example of a well-developed, standardized hierarchy of documentation. On the *privilegio rodado*, its highest grade of document, see Villar Romero, *Privilegio y signo rodado*, especially 14–18 and 22; for the form and significance of such documents, see Borrero Fernández, *Sevilla*, 17–47; for their place in the documentary hierarchy of late medieval Castile, see Ostos Salcedo and Sanz Fuentes, "Corona de Castilla"; for reproductions of examples, with detailed catalogue entries, see Museo del Prado, *El documento pintado*, nos. 1–7; and, for a recent discussion of their origins, see Sánchez González, "Los 'Privilegios rodados,'" 369–74.

**5** See Queller, *The Office of Ambassador*, ix, 27–29; and Chaplais, "English Diplomatic Documents to the End of Edward III's Reign," and "English Diplomatic Documents," 21. Recent studies challenge some aspects of the diplomacy narrative: see, for example, Black, *A History of Diplomacy*, especially 43–44, who critiques what he sees as a "Whiggish" bent in diplomatic history, particularly its traditional account of "bureaucratic processes, notably systematization." The focus of these criticisms, however, is more on teleologically charged—and questionable—contrasts between medieval and early modern practices, rather than those

detail, but they share an underlying structural similarity: the eventual document manifests a kind of visible negotiation, the process of realizing a mutually authentic object.

The English royal chancery can offer some particularly suggestive examples. In the first place, England's documentary culture differed from that of much of continental Europe in an important respect: although notaries had by this time long since gained a foothold there, England remained the "land of the seal."<sup>6</sup> Notarial instruments never became as widespread, nor did notaries ever play as central an administrative and even social role, as they had for centuries in the notarial cultures of southern Europe.<sup>7</sup> England's diplomatic correspondence therefore demonstrates a chancery's approach to negotiating such a significant difference. English diplomatic practice has also been particularly well studied, most notably by Pierre Chaplais, who published many documents that now invite analysis from new perspectives. Most relevant here is his *English Medieval Diplomatic Practice*, particularly the second volume of facsimiles and commentaries.<sup>8</sup> Much understanding of how diplomatic encounters actually worked depends on his research, but he himself notes that the facsimile volume pays less attention to treaties than he would have wished, given the difficulties involved in their reproduction. When he does discuss them, or their subsidiary documents, "particular attention has been paid to the formulae used and to the handwriting, in an attempt to ascertain the part played by English and foreign clerks in the drafting and engrossing of the originals under consideration."<sup>9</sup>

These documents can also be approached in a way that is interpretive rather than deductive. Chaplais's efforts to deduce the choreography of a document's production—"the part played by English and foreign clerks"—extend equally to other elements of the documents' material character, such as sealing, seal attachment, and decoration. He aims to understand the specific logistics of diplomacy, the realities of human bodies in space down to the very moments when and where pen touched parchment and metal touched wax. To this end, he

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between the central and the later Middle Ages in Europe. For a better previous discussion of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century developments, see Guenée, *L'Occident*, 216–17.

<sup>6</sup> Cheney, *Notaries Public*; Zutshi, "Notaries Public"; Clanchy, *From Memory*, 299–300, 305–9.

<sup>7</sup> For notarial practice in southern Europe and more generally, see, for example, Petrucci, *Notarii*; Reyerson and Salata, *Medieval Notaries*; and Burns, "Notaries." For Portugal in particular, see Gomes, "O notariado."

<sup>8</sup> Chaplais, *English Medieval Diplomatic Practice* (hereafter *EMDP*), vol. 2; see also *English Diplomatic Practice in the Middle Ages*, and his catalogue of *Diplomatic Documents Preserved in the Public Record Office*.

<sup>9</sup> *EMDP*, vol. 2, 5.

looks to untangle the roles of the representatives of each communicating party; he therefore uses formal analysis as a diagnostic for a creator's regional origin. Nevertheless, there remains the expressive possibility of choice. Scribes, artists, and authors often adopt unfamiliar languages and conventions, both verbal and visual, as is already well known from a diverse range of examples, from scribes in northwestern Europe to painters in Nasrid Granada.<sup>10</sup> The creative imitation of "foreign" styles can work across time as well as space, as is shown in both paleographical and art-historical scholarship.<sup>11</sup> The departure from routine chancery practices therefore allows for the observation and interpretation of active choice.<sup>12</sup>

The documents of diplomacy demand such active choice. The vast majority of charters produced by a chancery of central government are instruments of domestic sovereignty, while diplomatic documents demand the creation of a charter with recognizable authority in (at least) two contexts.<sup>13</sup> A document that crossed contemporary jurisdictions needed to work in the visual language of the recipient as well as that of the issuing chancery; often, to address recipients of equal or higher status, rather than its sigillant's own subjects; and, finally, to evoke authority beyond the sigillant's own jurisdiction. This brief required discrimination among those aspects of a charter that had universal as opposed to local force, but also among those that related specifically to the act of communication, as opposed to the exercise of executive power. As authentic charters operating outside their native jurisdictions, treaty ratifications required their creators to devise a visual language that transcended the authority of the very chanceries that issued them: in other words, to create a "diplomatic aesthetic."

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**10** For a paleographical study, see Mynors, "A Fifteenth-Century Scribe"; for the paintings in the Alhambra Hall of Justice, see Dodds, "The Paintings in the Sala de Justicia"; and Robinson and Pinet, eds., *Courting the Alhambra*.

**11** See, for example, Parkes, "Archaizing Hands"; and Carqué, *Stil und Erinnerung*.

**12** For arguments emphasizing models of active choice rather than influence, in art history, see Marrow, "Dutch Manuscript Painting," 53–54: "Consideration of artistic interchange and inspiration are plentiful ... but far too many of these considerations are limited to enumerations of artistic influence, and neglect the more important questions of how and especially why specific visual traditions were emulated [and] why specific artistic or textual traditions were deemed worthy or appropriate for imitation." In diplomatics, see, Zutshi, "The Papal Chancery," 201.

**13** "Sovereignty" is a problematic word and concept even for the analysis of modern nation states; a clarified definition of the term is useful here, however. According to Krasner (*Sovereignty*, 3–4), a ruler's "domestic sovereignty" can be understood as "the formal organization of political authority within the borders of their own polity." Of course, "state" itself is a contentious term for medieval polities; see, recently, Taylor, *The Shape of the State*, 2–3.



## Two Examples: Windsor and Troyes

Late medieval European treaty ratifications structurally recall the more elevated public instruments issued in the name of a territory's ruler to its subjects, generally following the format of the highest grades of document: royal charters, privileges, or letters patent. This was by no means an obvious development or the only option. Some of the earliest treaty documents took the form of chirographs: duplicate agreements written on the same parchment sheet and then divided into a copy for each party. Several of these survive from the twelfth century, recording alliances between England and Flanders.<sup>14</sup> The material nature of a chirograph therefore suggests an occasion of mutual contact, even if a fictive one. The inscription of two copies of the text, on what is initially the same sheet, reinforces the document's symbolic connection to presence and performance, to an oath taken in person, in which both parties meet face to face. By contrast, the forms of later ratification documents suggest absence—or, rather, presence through representation—even when their texts specifically call for oath taking. Each party confirms, in his own name, the articles agreed by representatives, in a document in which he is represented by his seal.

In the case of the Treaty of Windsor (May 1386), documents survive for ratifications issued by both João I of Portugal (r. 1385–1433) and Richard II of England (r. 1377–1399), along with articles of agreement sealed by the two Portuguese proctors.<sup>15</sup> Richard's ratification and João's both appear as royal charters of confirmation, but they look very different from those more typically issued in their names. João's in particular looks unlike any other document issued by his chancery in script or format—in everything except the sealing (August 1387; Figures 9.1–9.3). In fact, the charter itself was written in Richard's chancery, then signed, notarized, and sealed in Portugal before its return to England (Figure 9.4). The two ratifications were therefore prepared under the same direction, and mirror each other in design.

At first glance, not surprisingly, Richard's ratification (February 1387/8) looks more like a typical product of his chancery. It was written in a relatively constructed

<sup>14</sup> TNA E 30/1–3, 5. See Chaplais, *Diplomatic Documents*, vol. 1, nos. 1–3, 7; and *EMDP*, vol. 1.ii, no. 243, and vol. 2, no. 1.

<sup>15</sup> TNA E 30/311; ANTT Gavetas, gav. 18, mç. 3, no. 25; TNA E 30/310. The alliance involved complex and extended negotiations, including several diplomatic missions and an earlier ratification by Richard, now ANTT gav. 18, mç. 1, no. 3. Chaplais suggests that João rejected the latter because it lacked the oath clause demanded by his own ratification document, emphasizing, however, that this remains “a matter for speculation.” For the documents associated with the treaty, see Rymer, *Foedera*, vol. 7, 515–23, 561–62; Arquivo nacional da Torre do Tombo, *As gavetas*, vol. 8, 2–10, 312–20; Russell, *The English Intervention*, 414–15, 493n5, 515–18, 527–28, 547–48; *EMDP*, vol. 1.ii, 522–27; and Trowbridge, “History's Unparalleled Alliance” (with excellent colour images of some of the documents).

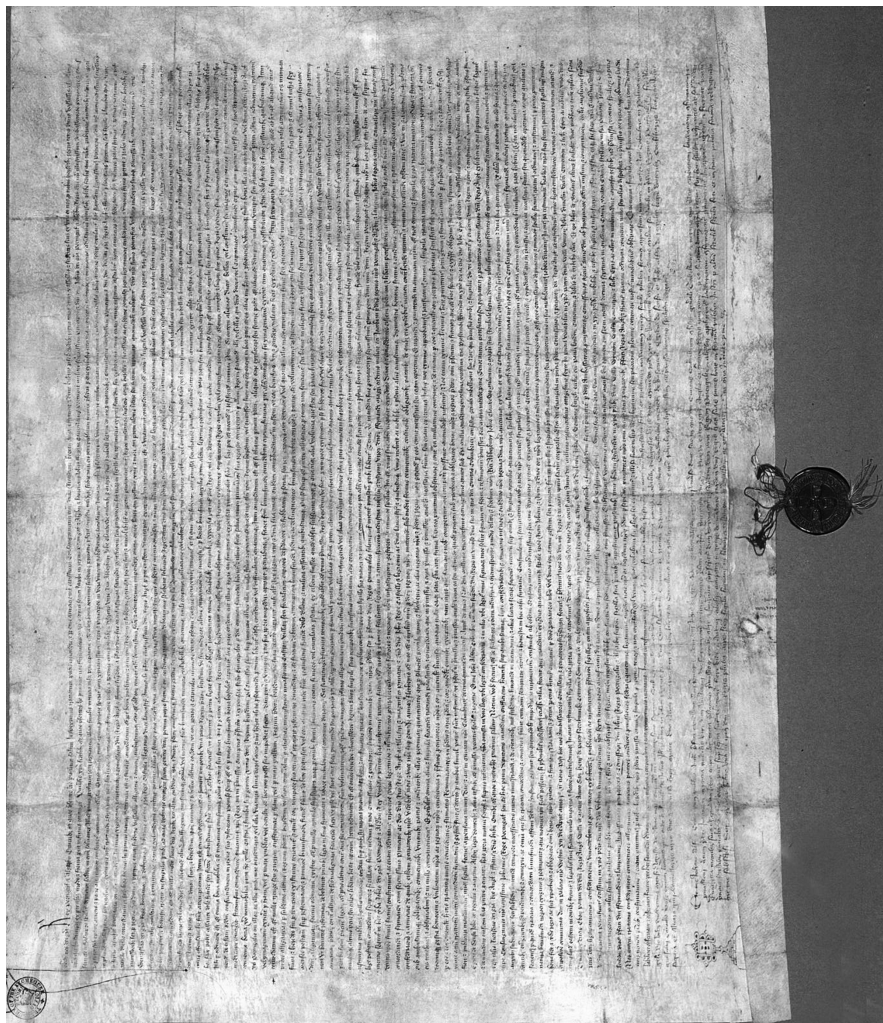


Figure 9.1. Ratification of the Treaty of Windsor. Kew, The National Archives, E 30/311 (reproduced with permission).

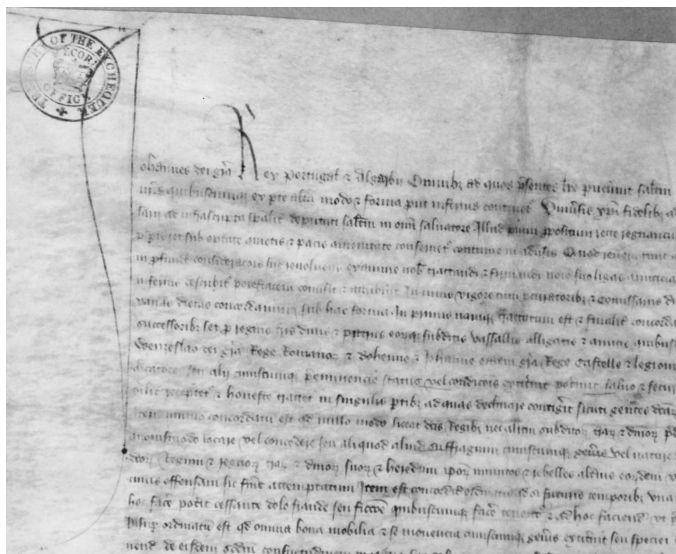


Figure 9.2. Detail of Figure 9.1: initial letter.

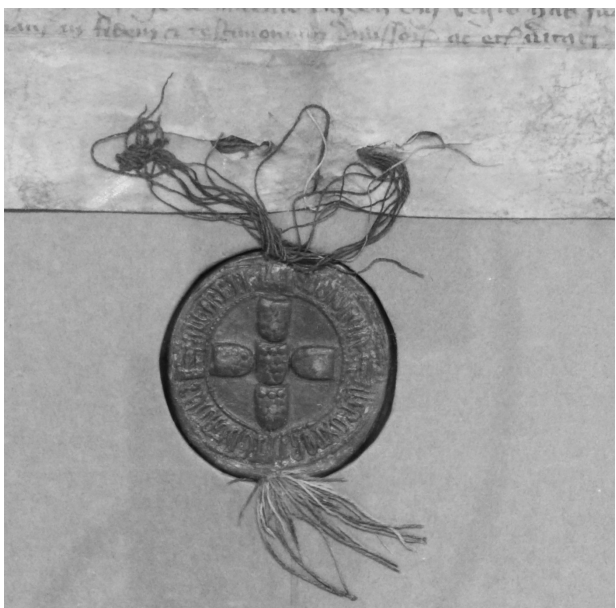


Figure 9.3. Detail of Figure 9.1: seal.

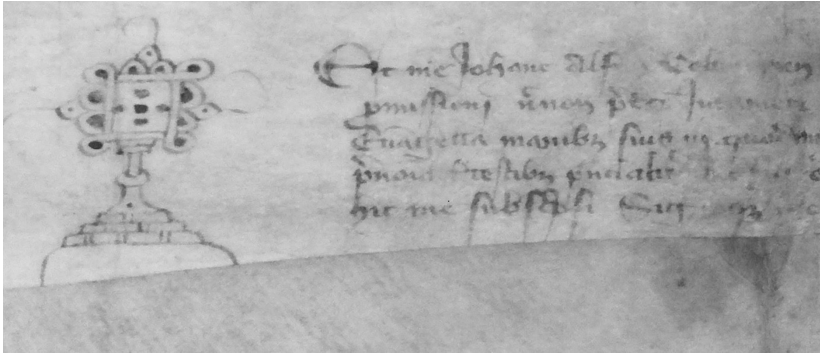


Figure 9.4. Detail of Figure 9.1: notarial mark.

hand, on parchment; it was originally sealed with the Great Seal, attached on red and green braided cords; and it had the name of the supervising clerk, Burton, inscribed in the lower right-hand corner (Figures 9.5–9.6). It begins with the same language as an *inspeximus* charter—that is, a charter whose author declares that he or she has inspected and confirmed an earlier charter, a form often used to validate privileges granted by predecessors. Here, the peace treaty is the confirmed document, initially incorporated smoothly into what would have been a common English formula. And yet, ultimately, there are differences to this formula that go beyond the content of the charter confirmed: if the first line is familiar, the last is not. The ratification is dated the twenty-fourth day of February, AD 1387, and in the eleventh year of Richard’s reign, where usually only the regnal year would have appeared. So the text combines its own chancery’s dating system, which draws its meaning from the history of royal power, with the universal chronology of sacred history. The document also includes a validation clause, which signals its unusual methods and signs of authentication: “In witness whereof, we have commanded our present letters to be written and issued in the form of a public instrument by the notary public mentioned below, and we have had them confirmed by the affixing of our Great Seal.”<sup>16</sup> In addition to the Great Seal, then, Richard’s charter also bears a notarial sign and attestation. With this, the chancery has merged an English confirmation document into a hybrid record, imbricating the different practices of author and recipient, and the impressed and inscribed image as modes of validation.

Below the main text of the document, in darker ink, is the notarial mark and attestation of John de Bouland (Figure 9.7). He is the same notary whose mark

<sup>16</sup> “In cuius rei testimonium presentes literas nostras in formam publici instrumenti per notarium publicum infrascriptum fieri et publicari mandauimus nostrique sigilli magni fecimus appensione muniri.”





Figure 9.5: Ratification of the Treaty of Windsor: Lisbon, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, PT/TT/GAV/18/3/25 (image provided by ANTT, Tratado de paz, amizade e confederaçao entre D. João I e Ricardo II, rei de Inglaterra, denominado tratador de Windsor).

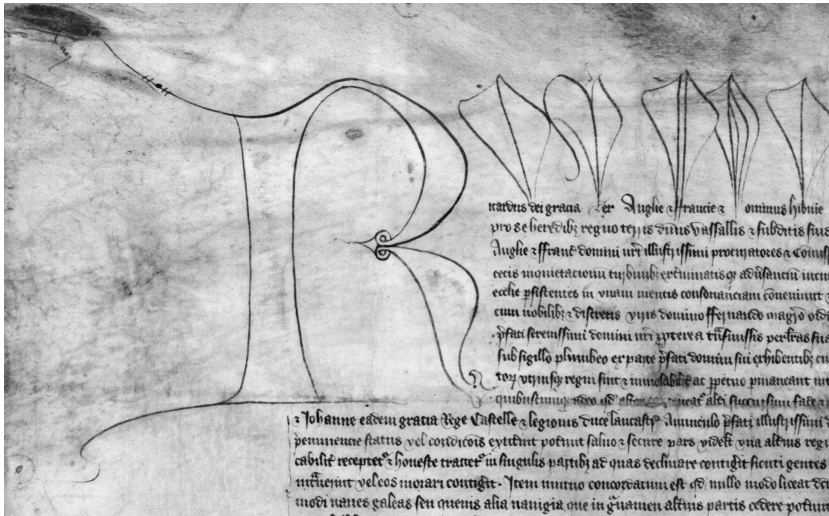


Figure 9.6. Detail of Figure 9.5: initial.

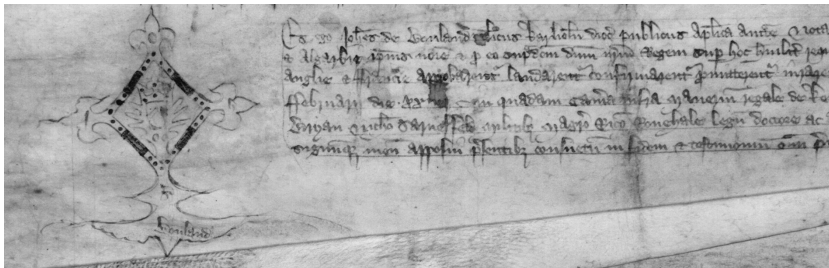


Figure 9.7. Detail of Figure 9.5: notarial mark.

appeared on the treaty's articles of agreement (Figure 9.8), as well as on other documents he attested.<sup>17</sup> Although his attestation notes that he holds his position of notary public by apostolic authority, his *signum* incorporates imagery that is heraldic rather than sacral: a crowned hart in a diamond, with three fleur-de-lis terminals each containing a letter of his first name and a lower expanded terminal bearing his patronymic; compare, for example, the notarial sign on the Portuguese ratification (Figure 9.4).<sup>18</sup> The full *signum* is visible on the articles of agreement,

<sup>17</sup> Several documents with his sign are now in Chancery Miscellanea, TNA C 270/25.

<sup>18</sup> Compare also the "*seings-ostensoirs*" discussed in Fraenkel, *La signature*, 165–68, 170–72.

while the plica of the ratification partially obscures it, along with the last line of the attestation, because the execution of the two forms of authentication followed the order described in the document: notarial mark and attestation; folding; sealing with the Great Seal. Notarial practices had a far more long-standing and important place in Portuguese documentation than in English, although there, too, these practices changed and developed over the course of this period.<sup>19</sup> Yet Portuguese royal charters did not conventionally bear notarial attestations, either; rather, they bore the king's seal and sign manual. So Richard's ratification does not, in fact, mimic precisely the conventions of its recipient chancery, either.

However, on the structural level of representational mode—rather than of specific represented signs—the document does conform to the conventions of Portuguese royal charters, in that it has both inscribed and impressed signs of authentication. This, too, represents a departure from the English royal chancery's usual process: not only notarial practices, but graphic symbols more generally figure far less in English documents than in those of continental Europe.<sup>20</sup> So, in this final treaty ratification, the chancery signifies validity both within and beyond its own jurisdiction through the creation of an amalgamated charter: textually an *inspeximus* by letters patent, formally a notarized royal charter; to be confirmed (*muniri*) by the impression of the Great Seal, but proclaimed (*publicari*) through its inscription as a public instrument. In this instance, the “diplomatic aesthetic” has produced neither an English nor a Portuguese document, but one that invokes an idea of common authority. Indeed, within England, notarial practices were most developed to deal with matters that involved foreigners, ecclesiastical circles, and curial litigation.<sup>21</sup> This is clearly an example of the first case, but the last may be relevant here as well. The presence of a notarial attestation suggests universality, in part through its allusion to an overarching sovereignty.

Ratification documents for the Treaty of Troyes (1420) between Charles VI of France and Henry V of England also survive from both sides, and these again take the form of large royal charters and letters patent.<sup>22</sup> The French document kept in the English Exchequer Treasury of Receipt is written in French in a current hand, leaving no vertical space for an initial; rather, the scribe has left spaces within the

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19 Gomes, “O notariado,” especially comments 247.

20 See Sayers, “The Land of Chirograph.”

21 Cheney, *Notaries Public*, especially 17, 22, 40, 52.

22 TNA E 30/4111; AN AE/II/254. See Rymer, *Foedera; EMDP*, vol. 1.ii, 629–36; and Danbury, “English and French Artistic Propaganda,” 97. As with the Windsor treaty, several ratification documents survive, but in the case of Troyes these are multiples of the same exemplars (see *EMDP*, vol. 1.ii, 629, 635); those discussed here are the definitively sealed engrossments in each royal treasury.

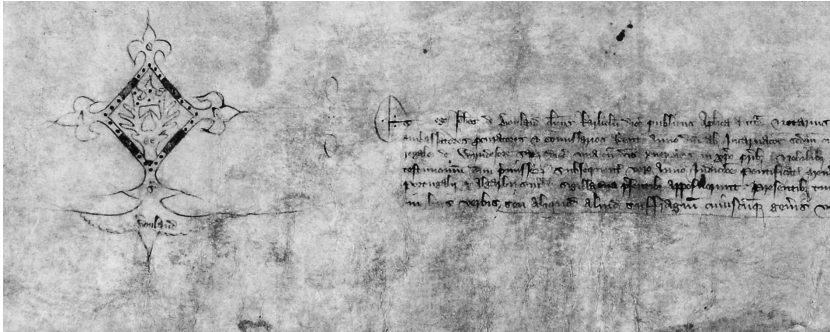


Figure 9.8. Articles of Agreement for the Treaty of Windsor. Kew, The National Archives, E 30/310: detail of notarial mark (image used with permission).

top line alone (Figure 9.9). In these spaces, the words “Charles” and “Perpetuelle” appear in a large gothic display script, with intricate strapwork composing the back of the “C,” as well as decorating ascenders throughout the top line. Within the body of the document, a more subdued display script calls attention to the initial words of clauses. The document is then sealed in green wax on red and green silk cords (Figure 9.10). For the English ratification, housed in the French Trésor des chartes, the document’s scribe writes in Latin and adopts a more constructed treatment of the script (Figures 9.11–9.12). Here, too, the initial words of the treaty’s clauses stand out in *textualis* display script, one line high, and space in the top line has been left for the king’s name, as well as for the first letters of each word in the royal style, and the “A” in “Ad perpetuam rei memoriam.” The king’s name written in gothic display script, about two lines high, fills this space, along with penwork initials to the royal style, a penwork initial “A”—a fictive scroll in grisaille—about four lines high, and a few cadels of the same height. Here the scribe has left space for an initial letter, of five lines with an outward curve at the right to accommodate the bow of the “H” in “Henricus”; the elaborate letter, in ink alone but very fine, more than fills this space, extending out into the upper and left margins, as well as the top line of the text space. The initial has reserved decoration of three fleurs-de-lis in the backstroke, and of three lions, modelled in grisaille, in the bow. A crown surrounds the top of the letter, inscribed “fides / pax / iusticia” across the band. The document has then been sealed with the Great Seal in dark green wax, attached on a braided cord of brown silk (Figure 9.11).

Although the conventions of French and English documents correspond more closely than English and Portuguese ones, Henry V’s charter is just as idiosyncratic as the Windsor ratification, if in a very different way. Some of its visual features



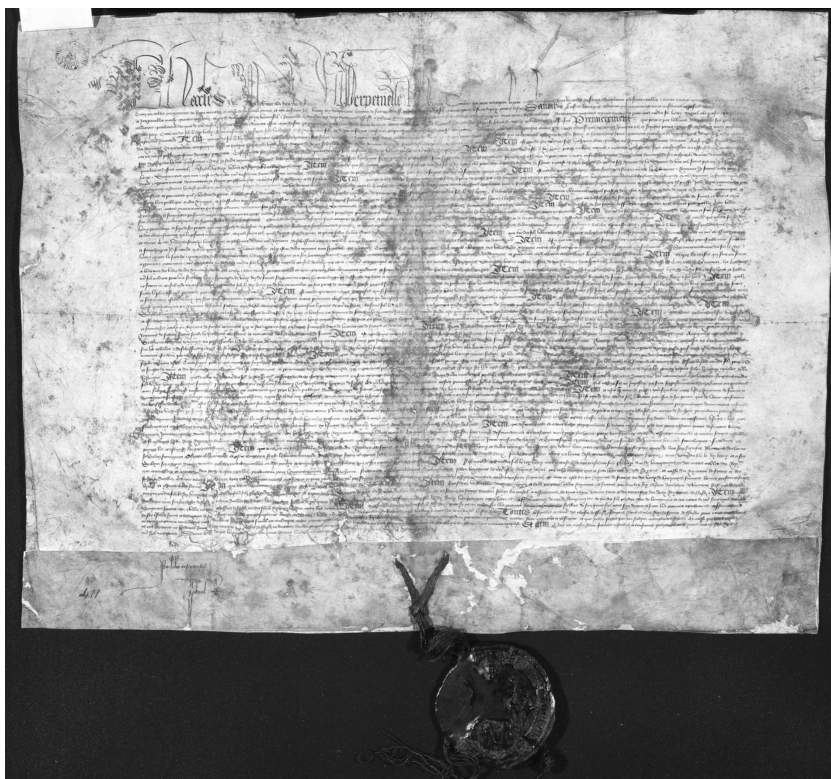


Figure 9.9. Ratification of the Treaty of Troyes. Kew, The National Archives, E 30/411 (reproduced with permission).

resemble charters and letters patent issued by the chancery to domestic recipients at around the same time: the seal itself; the wax colour of the sealing (though not the colour of the cords); and the decorative cadels. Some of the decoration has domestic analogues as well. For example, a charter of incorporation issued to the Merchant Taylors' Company in 1408, with pen-flourishing to the "H" of "Henricus," which is then surmounted by a crown bearing the legend "Souereyne" similar to that on the Troyes ratification, if less elaborate.<sup>23</sup> The script differs, however, and has been identified by Chaplais as "an English ('Secretary') hand."<sup>24</sup> It has some features (single-compartment "a," looped ascender on "d," "g" as a bucket rather

<sup>23</sup> Fry and Sayle, *The Charters*, n.p., full reproduction, accidentally captioned as the 1503 charter.

<sup>24</sup> *EMDP*, vol. 1.ii, 629.

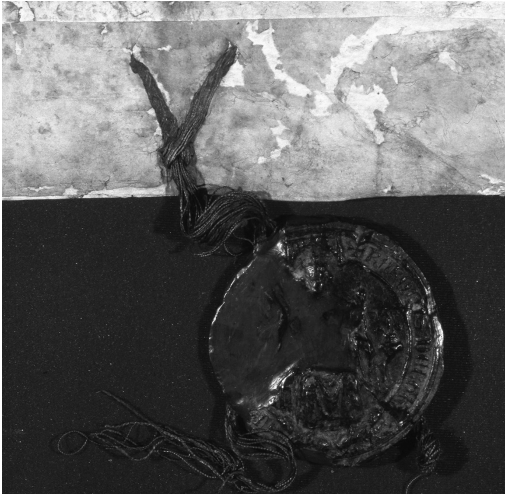


Figure 9.10. Detail of  
Figure 9.9: seal.

than a figure “8”) more reminiscent of a formal French document, including display script for initial words of clauses rather than scribal elaboration of their initial letters, a pattern not normally adopted by the English chancery at this stage. Here, the negotiated aesthetic emerges not from competing modes of validation but from competing concepts of design.

### Letterhead and “Extraordinary Fireworks”

Diplomacy in general, and treaties in particular, perennially involve the construction of authority through cultural forms—ceremonies, oaths, exchanges of gifts—that have performative, linguistic, visual, and material elements. These cultural forms have included everything from elaborate ritual to exchanged works of art, to artists as diplomats or as diplomatic gifts themselves, to staged encounters with architecture and landscape.<sup>25</sup> Like many of the most famous diplomatic gifts of portraiture, late medieval treaty ratifications allowed for the exchange of the royal

<sup>25</sup> For ceremonial, see Queller, *The Office of Ambassador*, 188–208; and Roosen, “Early Modern Diplomatic Ceremonial.” For art as diplomatic gift in Byzantium, see Cormack, “But Is It Art?”; Muthesius, “Silken Diplomacy”; Lowden, “The Luxury Book”; Cutler, “Significant Gifts”; and Hilsdale, *Byzantine Art and Diplomacy* (with extensive further bibliography). For art as a diplomatic gift in early modern western Europe, see Bodart, “Enjeux”; Colantuono, “The Mute Diplomat”; and Sowerby, “A Memorial.” For the artist as gift, see Kim, “Gentile in Red”; and, for staged encounters, see Berger and Hedin, *Diplomatic Tours in the Gardens of Versailles*, 25–30, 68–69, for visiting diplomats from Spain, Russia, Morocco, Algeria, Genoa, and Tripoli.

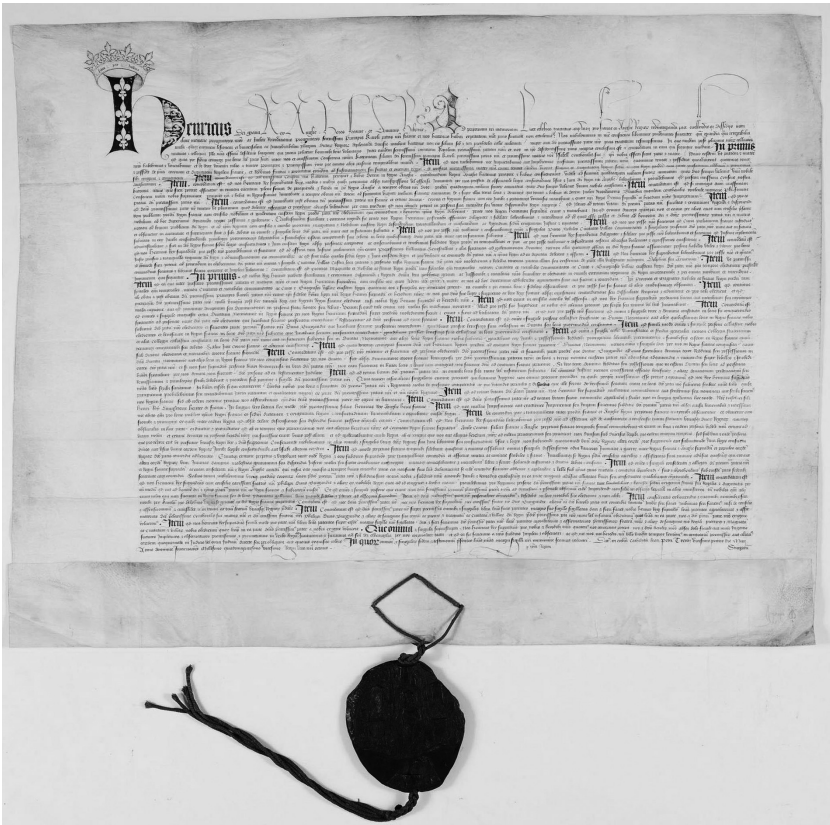


Figure 9.11. Ratification of the Treaty of Troyes. Paris, Archives nationales de France, AE/III/254 (public domain).

image—in the form of a seal. And, furthermore, their “diplomatic aesthetic” offers a framework for understanding the broader material and visual culture of diplomacy. One can also see them as the nuclei of spectacular ceremonies, the permanent fragments of larger, lost, performances.

A much later account of the Russian ambassador’s delegation to London in 1662 vividly evokes such a setting:

[The ambassador’s] retinue [with] their caps of fur, tunics, richly embroidered with gold and pearls, made a glorious show. The King being seated under a canopy in the Banqueting-house, the Secretary of the Embassy went before the Ambassador in a grave march, holding up his master’s letters of credence in a crimson taffeta scarf before his forehead. The Ambassador then delivered

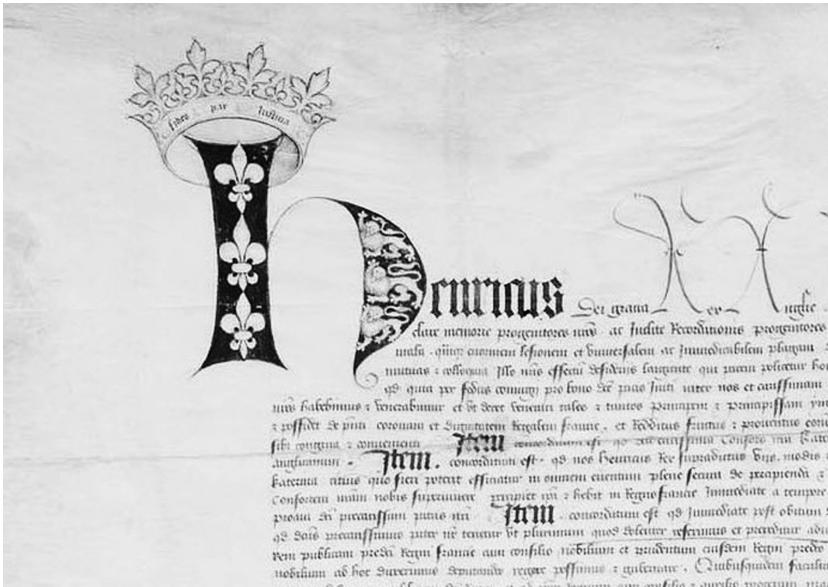


Figure 9.12. Detail of Figure 9.11: initial.

it with a profound reverence to the King, who gave it to our Secretary of State: it was written in a long and lofty style. Then came in the presents borne by 165 of his retinue ... These borne by so long a train rendered it very extraordinary. Wind music played all the while in the galleries above.<sup>26</sup>

Grand ceremonies could also attend the “conclusion or proclamation of a treaty.” For example, a fifteenth-century Venetian source records such an event involving about forty boats adorned with heraldry, as well as trumpet music, “extraordinary fireworks,” bonfires, processions, “splendid” costumes, and “pageants and mysteries.”<sup>27</sup>

The importance of these material and visual aspects of diplomatic negotiation can be implicit even in analytic studies that at first seem far removed from medieval cultural history. For example, a recent study of international law uses a “domestic analogy” to illustrate two of the subject’s fundamental questions: why

<sup>26</sup> Bray, ed., *The Diary of John Evelyn*, vol. 1, 366–67; quoted in Roosen, “Early Modern Diplomatic Ceremonial,” 467–68.

<sup>27</sup> Queller, *The Office of Ambassador*, 190, 198–200, 209–10. This ceremonial emphasis relates closely to his thesis about ratification documents themselves, namely that they were not in and of themselves inevitably necessary, if the negotiating representatives had full power to conclude.

do states comply with international law, and why should states comply with international law?

Suppose that I, as a university professor, lend a book to a student. The book is not returned, and I ask for it back. If it is still not returned, despite increasingly urgent informal requests, I might write to the student on University notepaper. [... T]he shift into the University context increases my power as against that of the student [and] shifts in the context of the dispute, in the factors and types of argument that are relevant, and the relative power of me and of the student, have been effected through the use of language. [... I]t is by no means the case that the persuasive power of the law depends upon the immediate availability of some means of enforcement.<sup>28</sup>

In fact, not all the shifts in this scenario are effected through the use of language; or, rather, of language in isolation from its material manifestation. The analogy begins with a visual example: the university notepaper. This is a revealing choice, as visual language often plays as central a role in encounters that, although they pre-date international law as such, share its salient feature of evoking authority in the absence of unambiguous sovereignty. The analysis of diplomacy's central texts—looking at these, too, as material and cultural objects—tests the functional modalities of writing practices.

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<sup>28</sup> Lowe, *International Law*, 18, 29–30.

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### Abbreviations

AN Archives nationales de France (Paris)  
 ANTT Arquivo nacional da Torre do Tombo (Lisbon)  
 ASV Archivio segreto Vaticano (Rome)  
 BL British Library (London)  
 EMDP Chaplais, *English Medieval Diplomatic Practice*  
 TNA The National Archives of the United Kingdom (Kew)

### Manuscripts and Documents (by Shelfmark or Reference Code)

AN AE/II/254  
 AN AE/III/14  
 ASV AA Arm. I–XVIII 448  
 London, Merchant Taylors' Company charter (1408)  
 ANTT Gavetas, gav. 18, mç. 1, no. 3  
 ANTT Gavetas, gav. 18, mç. 3, no. 25  
 TNA E 30/1  
 TNA E 30/2  
 TNA E 30/3  
 TNA E 30/5  
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 Pares (Portal de archivos españoles)

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**Abstract** The charters of medieval diplomacy are essays in formulating a lingua franca of documentary communication. Through the process of realizing a mutually authentic textual object, they make negotiation visible. This essay examines some examples in detail from treaties concluded between England, France, and Portugal, in the context of a broader methodological intervention: to join the forces of New Diplomatic History with the study of material texts as visual culture.

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**Keywords** England, France, diplomatics, material texts, medieval, New Diplomatic History, paleography, Portugal, treaties, visual culture

# INDEX

- Abbasids, 138  
 administration, 3, 6–7, 19, 34, 55,  
     99–141, 149–53, 158, 181, 214–16.  
     *See also* bureaucracy; chanceries;  
     courts  
 agency, 5, 8, 9  
     distributed, 107, 136, 171–72, 200  
 Africa, 113n24, 194  
     North, 113n24  
     West, 184  
 agreement(s), 135–42, 213, 215, 218,  
     223, 225. *See also* treaties  
     articles of, 213, 215, 218, 223, 225  
     peace, 135–26  
 al-Andalus, 100, 112–14, 116–17, 122,  
     124, 131–41. *See also* Spain  
 Albert, 49–51, 55–56, 62–66  
 Alexander the Great, 10  
 alterity, 4, 6, 5, 9, 22, 29, 52, 120–21,  
     134–35, 140, 149  
 ambassadors, 215, 227–29.  
     *See also* diplomacy; envoys  
 amulet(s), 20, 34, 37, 39, 42, 195, 202  
 aniconism, 57, 81, 124  
 animals, 10, 76, 80–85, 90, 91, 124, 127,  
     131, 167  
     kingship associated with, 10, 73–95  
 antiquarians/antiquarianism, 100,  
     112–13, 186, 208  
 Aquinas, Thomas, 50, 59–60, 64–65  
 Arabia, 2, 5, 99–100, 110, 123, 127–29  
 Arabic, 5, 9–10, 49–52, 55, 71, 75, 78,  
     82–83, 94, 101–41, 179  
 Arabicization, 6, 106  
 Arabs, 6, 99–141, 149  
 Aramaic, 125, 128n76, 131  
 archaeology, 4–5, 18, 184–85, 193–212  
 archives, 218–27  
 Aristotle, 21  
 Arnald of Villanova, 53–56  
 artistic influences, 93, 127  
 Asia, 1–2, 20, 28, 38, 40–42, 73–95, 102,  
     112, 114, 122, 139, 153, 184  
     Central, 8, 20, 28, 40–41, 102, 114,  
     122, 132  
     East, 20, 38, 42  
     Minor, 1, 153  
     South, 41  
     Southeast, 2, 7, 73–95, 112  
     western, 20, 75  
 astrology, 50, 65  
 astrological images, 50, 52, 63–65  
 astronomy, 5, 49–50, 53, 60, 63, 66  
 authentication, 10–11, 126, 127, 167,  
     193, 195, 198, 221, 224  
 Bactria, 102–4, 113n26, 115n34, 126  
 Bedos-Rezak, Brigitte Miram, 15,  
     20–21, 23, 49, 213  
 bell(s), 198, 199  
     church, 198, 199  
     founders, 199  
 birds, 32, 55, 84, 124  
 bishops, 55, 56, 62, 156–58, 183, 193,  
     195–98, 200, 202–7  
     burials of, 196. *See also* burial deposits  
 bodhisattva(s), 25–28, 34–36, 41  
 body/bodies, 10, 20, 26, 29, 36,  
     53–54, 56, 58, 60, 73, 75, 173, 177,  
     202, 225  
 Borneo, 76, 94  
 Britain, 7, 21, 23, 175, 185, 200  
 British Museum, 28, 168, 170,  
     174, 185–86  
 bronze, 24, 26, 29, 34, 39, 130–31, 140,  
     195, 198, 199, 200  
 bull(s) (seals), 6  
 Buddha, 8–9, 17–18, 21–23, 34–36,  
     38–39, 41, 85  
 Buddhism, 5, 8–9, 15, 18, 37, 38, 39,  
     41, 42, 84  
 buffalo, 80, 82, 91  
 bureaucracy, 132–33, 215. *See also*  
     administration; chanceries; courts  
 burials, 200, 203, 204  
     burial deposits, 5, 196, 201  
 Byzantine Empire/Byzantium, 2, 4, 6–7,  
     10, 52, 55, 99, 106, 111–15, 118,  
     122–28, 131–32, 136–37, 140–41,  
     149, 150–52, 157–58, 173



- caliphs, 131, 140  
 calligraphy, 35, 84, 221–28.  
     *See also* scripts  
 canonical texts, 40, 213  
 canons, 30, 32–33, 40, 42.  
     *See also* scriptures  
     cathedral, 193  
 canonization, 33  
 Castile, 55, 215  
 cats, 80, 91  
 Chan tradition, 18–19, 21–23, 25  
 chanceries, 11, 76–80, 82, 86, 91,  
     106, 126, 130–32, 140, 173,  
     205, 207, 214, 221–27. *See also*  
     administration; bureaucracy; courts  
 Chaplais, Pierre, 216–17  
 China, 2, 6, 8–9, 15, 16, 18, 20–22, 24–26,  
     28–30, 34–42, 73, 84, 90, 139, 184  
 Chinese religious specialists, 15–42  
 Christian(s)/Christianity, 5, 9, 21, 23,  
     49–66, 119, 128, 133, 141  
 cities, 10, 27, 73, 77, 102, 150–59, 167,  
     178–79, 182–83, 206–7  
 clay, 5, 6, 22, 29, 31, 73, 100, 111,  
     113–15, 117, 124–26, 128, 131,  
     137–39, 167, 198  
     seals, 5, 22, 102, 115, 139  
     tablets, 1, 126, 128, 196  
 clerks, 206, 216, 221. *See also*  
     chanceries; clerks  
 clerics/clergy, 157, 207. *See also* priests  
 cloth(ing), 1, 4, 6–7, 167, 168, 170–75,  
     177–87, 195, 199–200  
     dyeing of, 171–73, 184  
 cloth seals, 4, 6–7, 168, 170–87  
 coins, 28, 106, 123, 131, 137, 141, 171, 198  
 collecting, 132, 174  
 commerce, 6–7, 29, 73, 107, 149, 181.  
     *See also* merchants; trade  
 Confusian(ism), 8–9, 29  
 connectivity, 3, 7  
 conquest, 6, 41, 77, 99, 120–30,  
     134, 136–41  
 Constantinople, 149, 151, 156  
 constellations, 49–50, 53, 59, 61,  
     63, 65–66  
 copper, 27–28, 112n22, 115, 133–34,  
     141n139, 175, 179, 197, 207  
 Coptic, 101, 107, 122, 124, 131  
 cords/cording, 34, 102, 167, 196,  
     221, 225–26  
 cosmology, 18, 23, 25–26  
 courts, 5, 10–11, 73–77, 86–87, 91–93,  
     131, 134, 138, 141, 173. *See also*  
     administration; bureaucracy;  
     chanceries; courts  
 crafts(men), 9, 29, 58, 63, 66, 158,  
     167, 181  
 crescents, 55, 92, 119, 137  
 Daoism, 8–9, 15, 22–23, 30,  
     32–33, 41–42  
 deities, 15, 17, 29, 33, 35–38, 41,  
     84–85. *See also* gods  
 Denmark, 5, 194, 196–97,  
     199–204, 206–8  
 deposition(s), 5  
 deeds, 104, 126n67, 139  
 design (seal), 8, 11, 27, 75–76, 80, 82,  
     84, 86, 91–92, 125, 138, 152, 168,  
     171–72, 183, 185, 193, 198, 206,  
     218, 227  
 devotion, 10, 152  
 Dharma, 17, 26, 77  
 die (seal), 7–9, 169, 182, 195, 197,  
     200, 205  
 diplomacy, 11, 213–17, 227, 230  
     and chanceries, 214–15, 217  
     treatises on, 21, 123  
 diplomatics, 213, 214  
 documents, 5, 6, 11, 17, 25, 27, 29,  
     75, 78, 89–94, 100–3, 108, 111,  
     113–15, 118, 120, 122–29,  
     131–32, 137, 138–39, 141, 150, 167,  
     173, 175, 181, 185, 193, 199, 200,  
     205, 213–18, 223–25  
 dogs, 65, 80–81, 85, 91, 124  
 Dunhuang, 25, 27–28, 34–36, 38–40, 85  
 Dutch East India Company, 77–81, 83,  
     86–88, 94, 184  
 economy/economics, 73, 120–21, 136,  
     138, 140, 149, 150  
 Egan, Geoff, 167, 169, 175–76, 178–79,  
     183, 186  
 edicts, 78, 89, 91–92  
 Egypt, 1, 4, 6, 20, 51, 99–101, 112,  
     114–15, 119–20, 122–26, 128–41

- Ptolemaic, 101n8, 125, 138–39  
 elephants, 80–83, 85, 91  
 embodiment, 8, 21  
 emperor(s), 30, 76, 90, 123, 155, 157  
 England, 6, 11, 167–68, 170, 172,  
     174–75, 177–78, 180, 183–84, 186,  
     199, 215–16, 218, 224  
 envoys, 88, 206–7. *See also* ambassadors;  
     diplomacy  
 Esoteric tradition, 15, 37–40, 42, 84  
 exchange, 3, 9, 11, 99, 119, 128, 194, 206,  
     207, 214, 215, 227  
 exorcism, 9, 25, 29, 39  
 Eurasia, 27, 41, 214  
 Europe, 2, 5–7, 11, 16, 73, 89, 94, 150,  
     152, 167–87, 193–208, 213–30  
     western, 2, 6, 16, 152, 174–82,  
     193–208, 213–30  
 exegetes/exegesis, 18, 25, 39, 57–66  
  
 flowers, 39, 75, 80, 84–86, 92, 94  
 forgery/forgeries, 179, 207  
 France, 6, 11, 35, 112, 135, 138,  
     168, 173–74, 177, 193, 195–96,  
     215, 224  
  
 Guanyin(s), 26–28, 35–36, 40–41  
 Germany, 6, 183  
 gems, 26, 51–52, 62–63, 124, 127.  
     *See also* jewel(s)  
 gift(s), 128, 227  
 gilding, 160, 181, 195, 197. *See also* gold  
 global/globalizing perspective, 1, 3–4,  
     136, 214  
 gold, 1, 26, 36–37, 52–57, 65, 73, 85, 90,  
     93, 105, 141, 167, 173, 204–5, 214,  
     228. *See also* gilding  
 God, 8, 21, 23–24, 49, 51, 56–57, 62–63,  
     75–76, 81–83, 85, 93, 102, 118, 123,  
     129, 134  
     Muslim (Allah), 8, 75–76, 81–83, 85,  
     93, 102, 118, 123, 129  
     Christian, 21, 49, 51, 56–57,  
     62–63, 134  
 gods, 9, 15, 24, 93, 156. *See also* deities  
 graves. *See* burials  
 Greece, 1, 20, 24  
 Greek, 5, 49, 101, 108, 114, 122–25, 128,  
     130–32, 140–41  
  
 hares, 107, 124  
 healing, 9, 25, 29, 32, 39–40, 55. *See also*  
     magic; medicine  
 heaven(s), 29, 52, 57–58, 60–62, 64, 125  
 heraldry, 81, 170, 172, 177–79, 183,  
     223, 229  
 Hindu/Hinduism, 10, 73, 75, 77, 84  
 historical method(s),  
     comparative, 4, 185, 215  
     global, 1, 3, 4, 136, 214  
     material culture, 3, 4, 6, 9, 16, 20, 42,  
     99, 106, 137  
 holiness, 10, 56, 84, 173, 195, 60.  
     *See also* saints  
 Huangbo, 19, 25  
 hybridity, 3, 9, 10, 11, 14, 41, 42, 81, 221  
     visual, 3, 11, 14  
  
 Iberia, 134, 136  
 iconography, 20, 25, 27, 34, 152, 156,  
     158, 202, 207  
 icons, 27–28, 91  
 identity, 5, 10, 16, 17, 24, 34, 38,  
     40–41, 75, 92, 100, 132, 149,  
     151–52, 158–59, 183, 196, 198.  
     *See also* personhood  
     and devotion, 10, 152  
     and identification, 167  
 images, 3, 5, 6, 10, 15–17, 19, 21–27,  
     40–41, 50, 52–53, 57–58, 62–65,  
     76, 81, 124–25, 130–31, 135–36,  
     152–53, 158, 186  
     indexical, 8  
 incantation, 25, 27, 33–39, 42  
 incense, 32, 52, 55  
 India/Indic world, 8, 15–16, 20, 28,  
     34–35, 38, 41–42, 73–75  
 ink, 6, 7, 75, 119, 127–28, 139, 221, 225  
 inscription(s), seal, 6, 10–11, 29,  
     30, 37, 40, 73, 75–78, 80, 88, 90,  
     92–94, 115, 123, 127, 130–31, 141,  
     150, 152, 168, 170, 177, 183, 185,  
     195, 198, 207, 218, 224  
 abbreviations in, 171, 183  
 names in, 9, 10, 24, 27, 29, 33, 37, 76, 92,  
     100, 132, 141, 150, 171, 179, 200, 218  
 poetry in, 10  
 titles in, 10, 29, 75, 78, 89, 100, 123,  
     132, 141

- Iran, 75, 102, 112, 114–15, 122–24, 140  
Iraq, 115n34, 120, 124, 129n79, 131, 135, 140  
Islam(ic), 4, 6–7, 10, 11, 55, 73, 75–78, 81, 83–84, 90–91, 94, 99–100, 108, 111–15, 118, 121, 123–32, 136–37, 140–41, 173  
Islamicization, 129, 130, 140  
ivory, 4, 194
- Jambi, 7, 10, 73, 76–95  
Japan, 18, 38–40, 84, 186  
Java(nese), 11, 76, 77, 80, 84, 89, 91  
jewel(s), 5, 26, 36, 110. *See also* gems  
Jew(s), 53, 55, 119, 133, 134, 136
- Khurasan, 100, 118–19, 126, 131, 137, 138, 140  
kingdom(s), 77, 88, 91, 185, 214  
kings, 1, 10–11, 29, 39, 52, 57–59, 62, 73, 83, 87–88, 90–91, 94, 128, 178, 205–6, 224–25, 228–29
- language (of seal inscriptions), 6, 15, 23, 75–77, 88, 122, 128, 130–31, 140–41, 170, 183, 217, 221, 230  
Latin, 1, 9, 49–55, 172, 177, 193, 225  
laws, 57, 78, 174n16, 178, 208, 229–30  
lead, 6–7, 57–58, 61, 64, 111–13, 115, 117–20, 124, 126, 128, 130–32, 135–37, 140–41, 152, 159, 167–86, 196, 199, 202, 204–7  
leather, 102, 122, 129n79, 139  
Leiden, 182, 186–87  
letters, 1, 25, 78, 80, 82–83, 88–89, 91–92, 94, 100–4, 110–11, 119, 122–23, 126–29, 150–52, 193, 204, 206–7, 213, 218, 221, 224, 226–29  
Levant, 100  
likeness, 8–9, 15, 21, 38, 58, 66  
linen, 174n15, 181, 183  
Linköping, 193, 207  
London, 167, 170–72  
lotus, 35, 75, 84, 86, 94  
love, 39, 50, 206
- Mabillon, Jean, 2  
magic, 5, 9, 24, 34, 41, 50–51, 56–59  
    addressative, 49, 64–65
- Malay(sia), 4, 7, 10, 73, 75–78, 80, 84, 87–94, 184  
    Old (language), 73  
manuals, 2, 25, 34–40, 123, 135  
Marwanids, 130, 135–36, 138, 140  
Marzio, Galeotto, 51, 65  
materials and material culture, 3–4, 6–7, 9, 34, 39, 42, 99, 106, 111, 119, 125, 137, 139, 170, 181, 182. *See also* historical method(s)  
matrix/matrices, 4, 17–18, 21–22, 56, 60, 66, 174, 177–78, 182, 193–94, 196, 200–3, 205–7  
medicine, 7, 24–25, 30–33, 35–36, 38, 40, 50, 55, 66. *See also* healing; magic  
Mediterranean, 20, 99, 136, 149, 182, 185  
merchants, 17, 94, 101, 128, 168–86, 226. *See also* commerce; trade  
Mesopotamia, 20–21, 100, 126, 128  
metal detector finds, 4, 112–13, 186, 199, 200, 208  
metaphor, 8, 15–18, 20–22, 24, 38, 41, 56, 61  
metropolitans, 150–51, 158  
Middle East, 5, 75, 113, 126, 139. *See also* Arabia; Asia; Iran; Iraq; Palestine; Syria; Mediterranean  
Minangkabau kings, 10, 76–77, 79, 86–91, 93, 94  
minerals, 56, 62, 66  
Ming dynasty, 33, 73  
mirrors, 37, 49  
monasteries, 1–2, 19, 133, 152, 158, 20, 203–4  
Montpellier, 53, 55  
moons, 53, 55, 125  
Morocco, 75, 227n25  
Muhammad, 8, 75, 79, 87, 128, 129  
myth(ical), 3, 10, 76, 90, 91
- Near East, 2, 20, 100–13, 125, 128, 135.  
    *See also* Asia; Egypt; Palestine; Syria; Mediterranean  
New Diplomatic History, 213  
New Year, 25, 104  
notaries, 193, 216. *See also* scribes  
Norway, 184, 202–4, 207

- ontology, 5, 22, 64
- ornaments, 5, 108, 196, 198
- Ottoman Empire, 82–84, 90, 94
- paleography, 214, 217
- Palestine, 115n39, 120–25, 130, 134–35, 137, 140. *See also* Syria-Palestine
- papacy, 173, 206
- paper, 6–7, 29, 115n35, 119, 139, 181, 230
- papyrus, 100–1, 103, 107–15, 119, 122–26, 128–35, 137–41
- parchment, 128, 139, 167, 178, 216, 218–22
- Paris, 35, 56, 60–62
  - University of, 60–62
- patrons/patronage, 10, 35, 77, 86–94, 150, 153, 156–58, 194
- Persia, 1–2, 75n5, 82n18, 94, 111n19, 120n44, 122, 133, 149
- personhood, 5, 10, 16, 18, 20, 24, 152. *See also* identity
- philosophy/philosophers, 3, 9, 24, 39, 41, 49–50, 62–65
- physicians, 9, 53–55, 168
- pilgrimage, 28, 123, 195
- pilgrim badges, 181, 195, 196, 198
- planet(s), 49–51, 59
- Plato/Neoplatonic philosophy, 21, 64, 66
- Pliny the Elder, 1
- popes, 54, 57, 173, 193, 206–7
- Portable Antiquities Scheme, 186, 208. *See also* metal detector finds
- Portugal, 94, 215, 218
- priests, 9, 16, 19, 33, 41, 157
  - Daoist, 9, 33, 41
  - Orthodox, 157
- print technology, 4–9, 16, 21, 23, 42, 49, 53–56, 59–66, 100–2, 106, 111–15, 117–20, 124, 126, 128, 132, 137–41, 168, 199, 202
- Pseudo-Ptolemy, 52–53, 58
- receipts, 101–3, 106, 109, 115n35, 125–26, 135–36, 206
- references/referentiality, 5, 9–10, 21, 39, 56–59, 62, 73, 78, 90, 94, 100, 111, 127, 133–34, 152, 158, 177, 183, 185, 213
- relics, 167, 195
- reliquaries, 167, 195
- replication technology, 8
- representation, 3, 8, 66, 218, 224
- rings, 1, 4–5, 52, 53, 73, 100, 111, 114, 118, 126–27, 139
  - signet, 1, 5, 73, 110–11, 114, 126, 139, 206–7
- ritual, 8, 9, 15, 20, 24–30, 32–42, 49, 227
- Roman Empire, 1–2, 20, 24, 90, 99, 115n34, 126, 149, 173, 185. *See also* Byzantine Empire/Byzantium
- Roskilde, 194–207
- rulers, 11, 77, 79–80, 87, 90, 120, 122, 128–30, 134, 136, 139. *See also* caliphs; emperors; kings
- Sabatier, Antoine, 168, 181
- saints, 10, 49, 124, 141, 150, 152–53, 156–58, 193–95
- Sanskrit, 15, 17–18
- Sasanids/Sasanian Empire, 2, 6, 99–101, 106, 111–12, 115, 124–38
- Scandinavia, 4, 6, 193–208
- scarabs, 1
- science, 39, 49–50, 56, 214
- scribes, 9, 15, 24, 27, 30, 35–37, 80–85, 92–93, 115, 118, 124, 129n79, 152, 179, 217, 221, 224–25. *See also* notaries
- script(s), 37, 73, 75, 78, 110, 128, 135, 218, 225, 226, 227
- scriptures, 8, 17, 19, 25–26, 33–24, 38–39
- scrolls, 80, 171, 225
- scholastic(s), 60, 62
- sealing practice(s), 3, 6, 8–9, 11, 15–16, 20, 24, 38, 40–41, 100–1, 108, 115, 124, 127–29, 136–39, 141, 170, 173, 185, 201, 205, 224
  - in Byzantium, 6, 10, 151–53, 158, 173
  - in China, 2, 6, 8–9, 15–16, 18, 20–22, 24, 25–26, 28–30, 34–42, 73, 84, 90, 139, 184
  - in England, 6, 11, 167–68, 170, 172–78, 180, 183–84, 186, 199, 215–16, 218, 224
  - in France, 6, 11, 35, 112, 135, 138, 168, 173–74, 177, 193, 195, 215, 224

- sealing practice(s) (cont.)  
 in the Indic world, 8, 15–16, 28,  
 34–35, 38, 41, 42, 73, 75  
 in Portugal, 94, 215, 218  
 in Malaysia, 184  
 in the Sasanian empire, 2, 6, 81,  
 99, 106, 111–12, 115, 124–28,  
 131–32, 135–38  
 in Scandinavia, 4, 6, 199–202  
 in the Islamic World, 81, 87
- seals  
 as adornment, 1, 18–19, 24, 31, 34, 41,  
 108, 110  
 and amulets, 20, 37, 39, 42, 195  
 and authentication, 1, 5, 10–11, 19, 94,  
 100, 102, 111, 125–27, 167, 182,  
 193, 195, 198, 207, 216–17, 221, 224  
 and authority, 17–18, 57, 88, 95, 100,  
 126, 139, 183, 215, 217, 223, 224,  
 227, 230  
 and captives, 6n18, 135, 137  
 as boundary markers, 9, 11, 78, 185  
 as channels of transmission, 3, 8,  
 15, 22, 40  
 circular and petal-shaped, 75–94  
 circulation of, 4, 6, 7, 193  
 as cloth marks, 167, 174, 182  
 and coins, 28, 105, 123, 131, 137, 141,  
 171, 198  
 as conceptual tools, 9, 15–42  
 in cultural encounters, 3, 5, 7, 9, 15,  
 227, 230  
 diamond-shaped, 76, 197, 223  
 dies, 7–9, 169, 182, 195, 197,  
 200, 205  
 historiography of, 174  
 and identity, 5, 10, 16–17, 24, 34, 38,  
 40–41, 75, 92, 100, 132, 149,  
 151–52, 158–59, 183, 196, 198  
 and incorporation, 226  
 as indexical signs, 8, 21, 59  
 as integrating media, 3, 213  
 and language, 6, 15, 23, 75–77, 88,  
 122, 128, 130–31, 140–41, 170, 183,  
 217, 221, 230  
 as metaphors, 8, 15–18, 20–22, 24, 38,  
 41, 56, 61  
 modes of production, 7–8, 25, 141,  
 171, 180, 193, 195, 198  
 motifs on, 3, 6, 125, 141, 152, 170  
 in multiethnic societies, 1, 7, 15, 75,  
 77, 91, 106, 110, 125, 128, 149  
 and mutable categories, 3, 5, 8, 9, 20, 100  
 and names, 9–10, 24, 27, 29, 33, 37, 76,  
 89, 92, 100, 132, 141, 150, 171, 179,  
 200, 218  
 and personhood, 5, 10, 16, 34  
 pointed-oval shape, 181, 196–97,  
 199, 202–4  
 and protection, 9, 17, 24, 29, 57, 76, 83,  
 100–2, 105, 117–19, 126, 135–36,  
 139, 156  
 rectangular, 171, 181, 198  
 and religion, 3, 9, 15–17, 19, 26, 33,  
 37, 41, 42  
 and script, 27, 37, 73, 75, 78, 110, 128,  
 135, 218, 225–27  
 and social categories, 20, 100  
 and status, 25, 100, 113, 132, 136, 200,  
 214, 217  
 and strategies of accommodation, 3, 7  
 as talismans, 5, 9, 15, 20, 22, 24, 27,  
 33, 35, 37–40, 49, 50–59, 62, 63–64,  
 66, 92, 94  
 and taxation, 6, 137, 167, 175, 179,  
 180, 184  
 and trade, 20, 24, 27–28, 77, 87,  
 149, 167–68, 170, 172, 175, 178,  
 180–85, 187  
 and transculturaltion, 3  
 as vehicles for inference, 8  
*See also* administration; design;  
 inscription(s); language; material  
 and materiality
- Seville, 55, 112, 134  
 Sicily, 112–13, 173  
 shipwreck, 184  
 Sichuan region, 27, 40  
 sigillography (study of seals), 2, 73, 167,  
 193, 195, 200  
 silk, 6, 27, 29, 173, 214, 225  
 silver, 1, 4, 52, 54, 60, 93, 141n139, 167,  
 170, 183, 200, 205, 214  
 slaves, 6, 135, 137  
 spells, 15, 33, 37–40. *See also* magic;  
 talismans
- Soghdia, 101n8, 126  
 Song dynasty, 19, 25, 27, 30–31,  
 33–35, 39, 73  
 Spain, 6, 173, 185, 227. *See also* al-Andalus

- Srivijaya, 73–74, 77, 84, 86  
 stamp(s), 4–7, 9, 15–18, 20, 22–31, 33,  
     36, 38–41, 56, 75, 78, 82, 94, 100,  
     111, 127, 132, 134, 139, 167–68,  
     177–78, 180, 199, 205  
 stars, 9, 49–53, 60–61, 63, 66, 111,  
     118–19, 125, 127n73, 137, 205  
 Strickmann, Michel, 33, 38  
 subjectivity, 3, 11  
 sultans, 76–95  
 Sumatra, 73, 76–77, 84–87, 91, 94–95  
 sun, 54–55, 125, 178  
 supernatural, 8, 9, 25, 30, 39, 65. *See also*  
     deities; gods; magic  
 swastika(s), 27–28, 37  
 Sweden, 193, 195–97, 200, 203, 207  
 Syria(-Palestine), 4, 6, 99–141, 153  
  
 talisman(s), 5, 9, 15, 20, 22, 24, 27, 33,  
     35, 37–40, 49–51, 53–54, 56–59,  
     62–64, 66, 92, 94  
 Tang dynasty, 8–10, 19, 21, 23–24,  
     27–28, 32–35, 37–40, 85n24  
 Tantric tradition, 15, 42, 84–85  
 tax/taxation, 6, 7, 101–2, 104, 119–20,  
     122, 125, 132–35, 137–38, 140,  
     151, 167–69, 171–73, 175, 177–80,  
     184, 187  
 textiles, 101, 139, 167, 168, 173–75,  
     179–85, 187, 195. *See also* cloth  
 theology/theologians, 9, 49–51, 56–57,  
     60–63, 66, 123  
 Thessaloniki, 149–51, 155–58  
 tigers, 30–31, 80–83, 85  
  
 trade, 20, 24, 27–28, 77, 87, 149, 167–68,  
     170, 172, 175, 178, 180–85, 187.  
     *See also* commerce; merchants  
 translations, 3, 6–9, 15, 26, 41, 49–52, 55,  
     88, 123  
 treatises, 21, 39, 53–56, 123, 135–36  
 treaty/treaties, 7, 11, 78, 80, 86,  
     89, 94, 134, 138, 213–18, 221,  
     223–25, 227–29  
 tribute, 112, 116–17, 133–34, 138, 140.  
     *See also* tax/taxation  
 Troyes, Treaty of, 218–21, 226  
  
 Umayyads, 106, 112–17, 123–24, 129–41  
 universities, 60–62, 84, 230  
 urban culture, 10, 133, 149, 150, 151,  
     152, 153, 156, 168  
  
 visual culture, 27, 213, 214, 228  
  
 waste, 5, 113  
 wax, 5–7, 54, 57, 60–61, 73, 100, 111,  
     113–14, 127, 167–68, 170, 172, 175,  
     178, 181, 185, 193, 198, 200, 204–5,  
     207, 216, 225–26  
 William of Auvergne, 50, 56, 59, 62  
 Windsor, Treaty of, 222–27  
 wire, 115, 117, 167  
 wood, 4, 24, 34–36, 39, 84, 127  
 wool, 168–69, 173–76, 183  
  
 Zen, 18. *See also* Chan tradition  
 zodiac, 49–54, 63, 66. *See also* astrology;  
     constellations

